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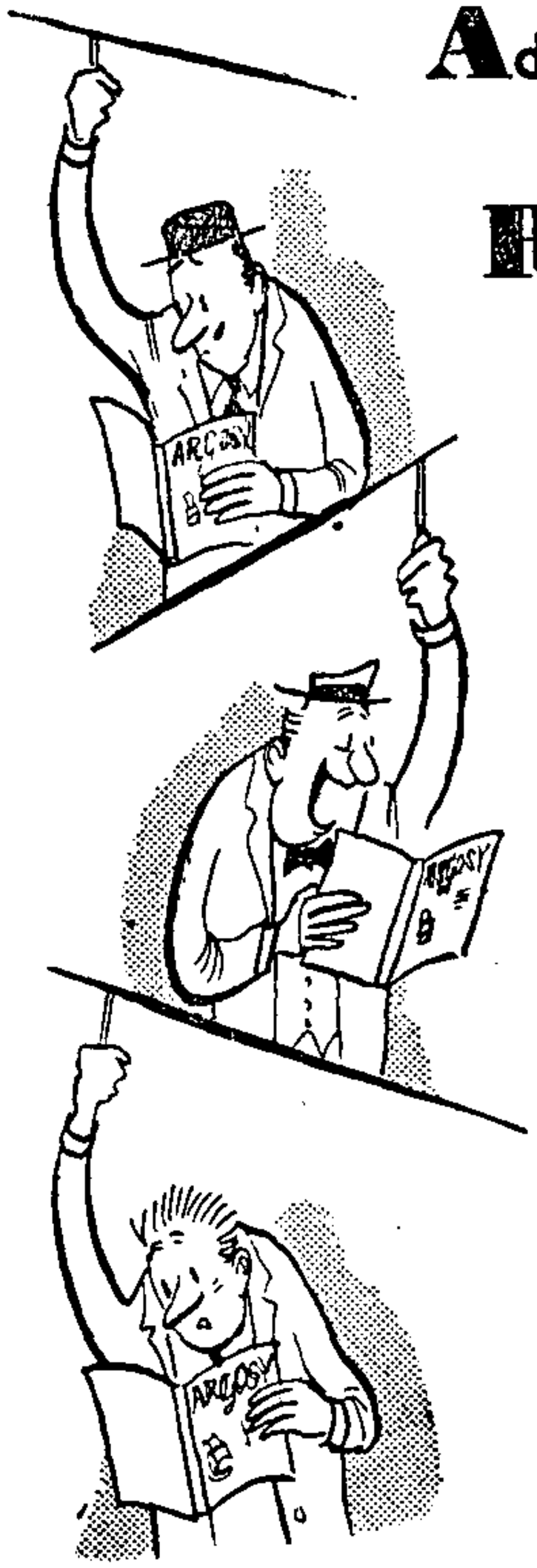


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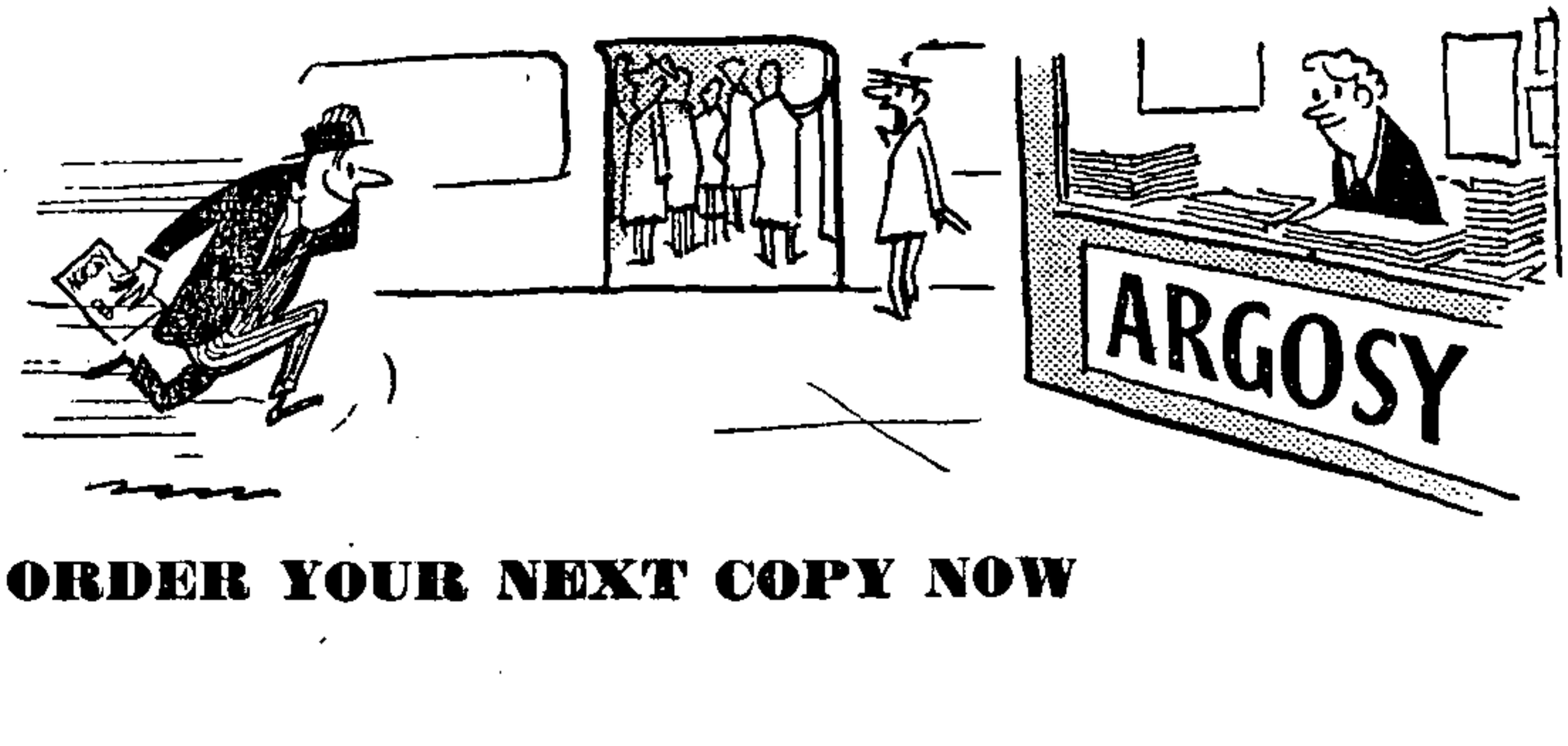
the short story magazine

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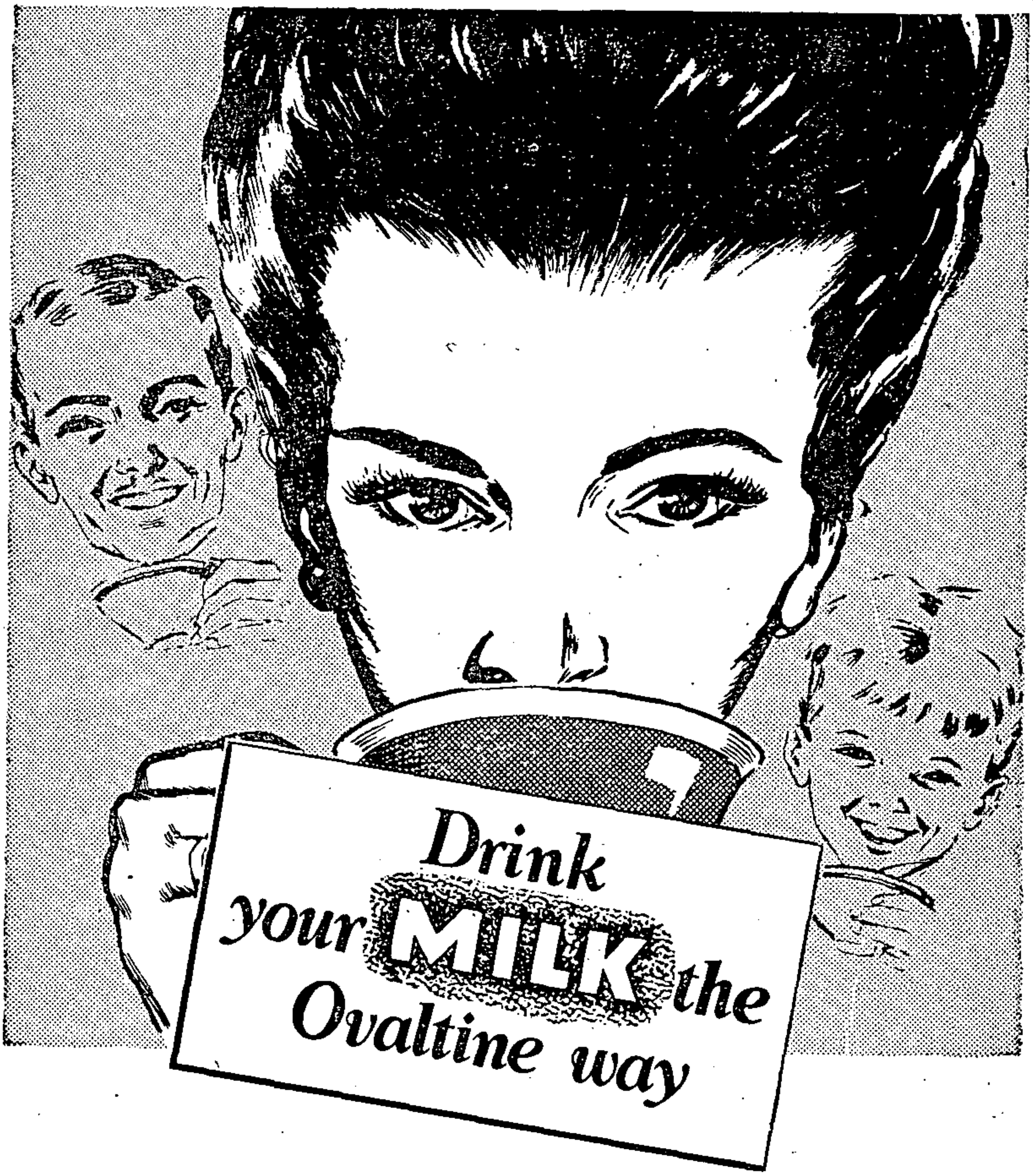


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# ARGOSY

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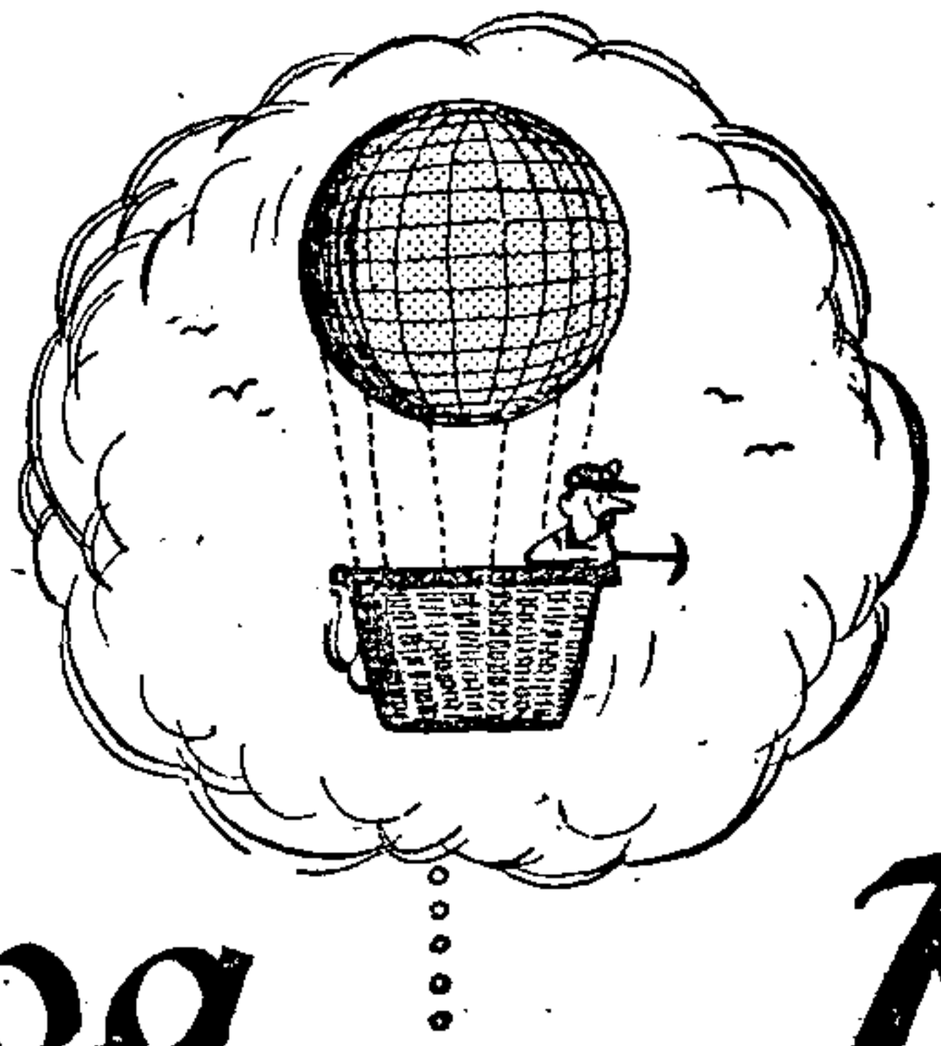


# Log Book

NEARLY everybody has a private fantasy about what they would have become if only circumstances had been different. With women, we understand, these dream-careers centre mostly round ballet: there, if it were not for an inability to balance, a slight excess of height, the wrong sort of legs, and the fact that she never trained, went Anna Pavlova.

Among men the fantasies are more various. Their range can be gauged from the small ad. columns, which often read as if they were the last safety-valve for distracted square pegs in round holes. "Balloon—(Around the World type) capable of carrying two men plus small cargo required . . ." "Eccentric but reliable ex-lawyer would like to join expedition to Central America . . ." "Four landlubbers planning sail round the world seek crew . . ." "Writer wishes inaccessible country house . . ." (*he'll* be sorry when he gets it.) "Model Rhinoceros wanted . . ." "Will any Baron not requiring his robes next Tuesday, please write . . ."

We suspect that few of these heart-cries ever get answered. Probably, subconsciously, the advertisers don't even *mean* them to be answered.

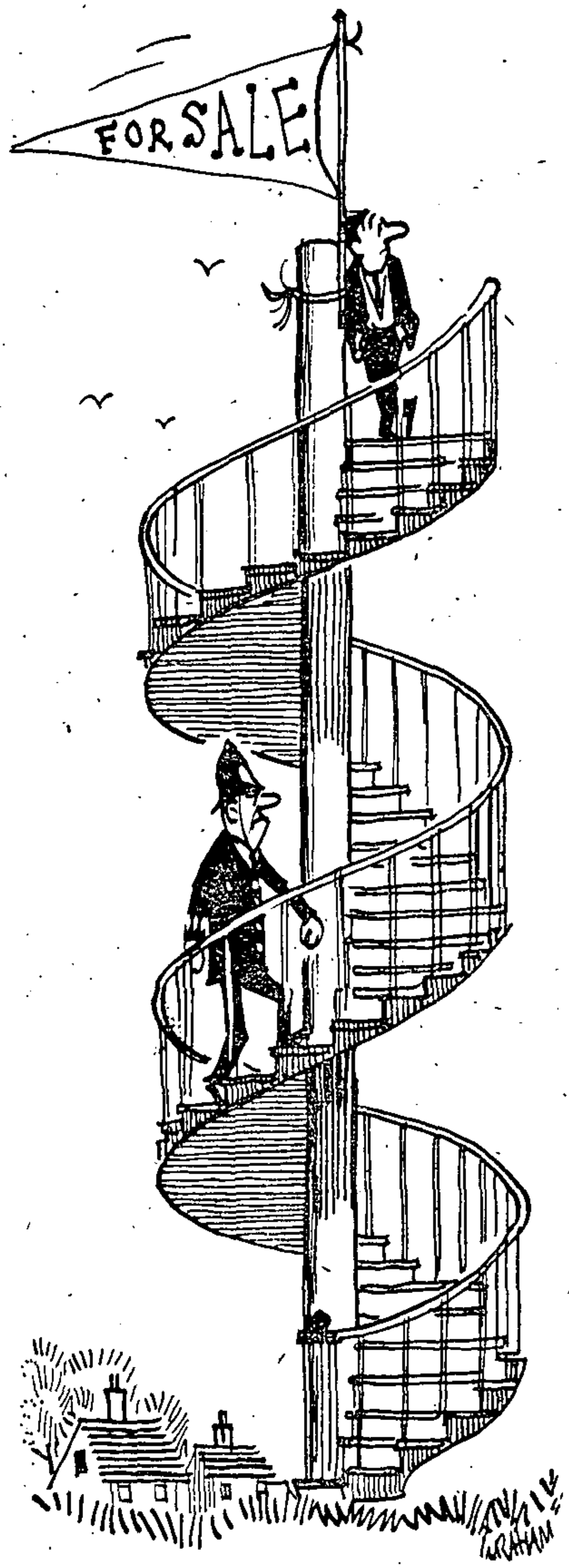
Once having advertised, and indulged in the visions of themselves sweeping, velvet-clad, into the House of Lords, dipping a bucket of snow to cool the champagne from the summit of Mt. Blanc, carrying a briefcase full of jungle equipment nonchalantly past

a posse of pygmies with blowpipes, the dreamers are content, no doubt, to return to their mundane occupations.

Sometimes these cries for help seem to be *absolutely* subconscious; at least we suspect that an example of this type was the Freudian misprint: "Manager accustomed to ruining seaside hotels seeks change of occupation . . ." And what is anyone to make of that distracted impecunious couple advertising for an iron spiral staircase?

Their excuse, that they are stranded on the first floor of a half-converted house, surely won't hold water—couldn't somebody come to the rescue with a helicopter? We suspect that secretly they see themselves as embryo film-directors, only needing the minimum of equipment to knock Dracula into a Hitchcocked hat. Their bluff is going to be called, though, for only a few days after their advertisement, somebody else's appeared: "Circular staircase, iron, 10 ft. 6 in. by 3 ft. 9 in. seen erected Hampstead."

We do wonder where it could have been seen erected. On the Heath? And did no officious policeman point out that it was creating an obstruction?



And why did the owner want to part with it? It's no use. Life is life and dream is dream, and never the twain shall meet, save in the agony column; most of us will never stand on the South Pole, or perform a brain operation, or pick up roses in the arena to shouts of *Olé!*

However, if you want to know what it feels like to do any of these things, you have only to keep your eye on the pages of Argosy which offer, we can confidently assert, the very best variety of vicarious experience.

**Berkely Mather** gives us an exciting run for our money in his first novel *The Achilles Affair*—opening chapters this month. This epic adventure of a British officer dropped on a special mission to the Yugoslav border is to be published in book form here and in U.S.A.

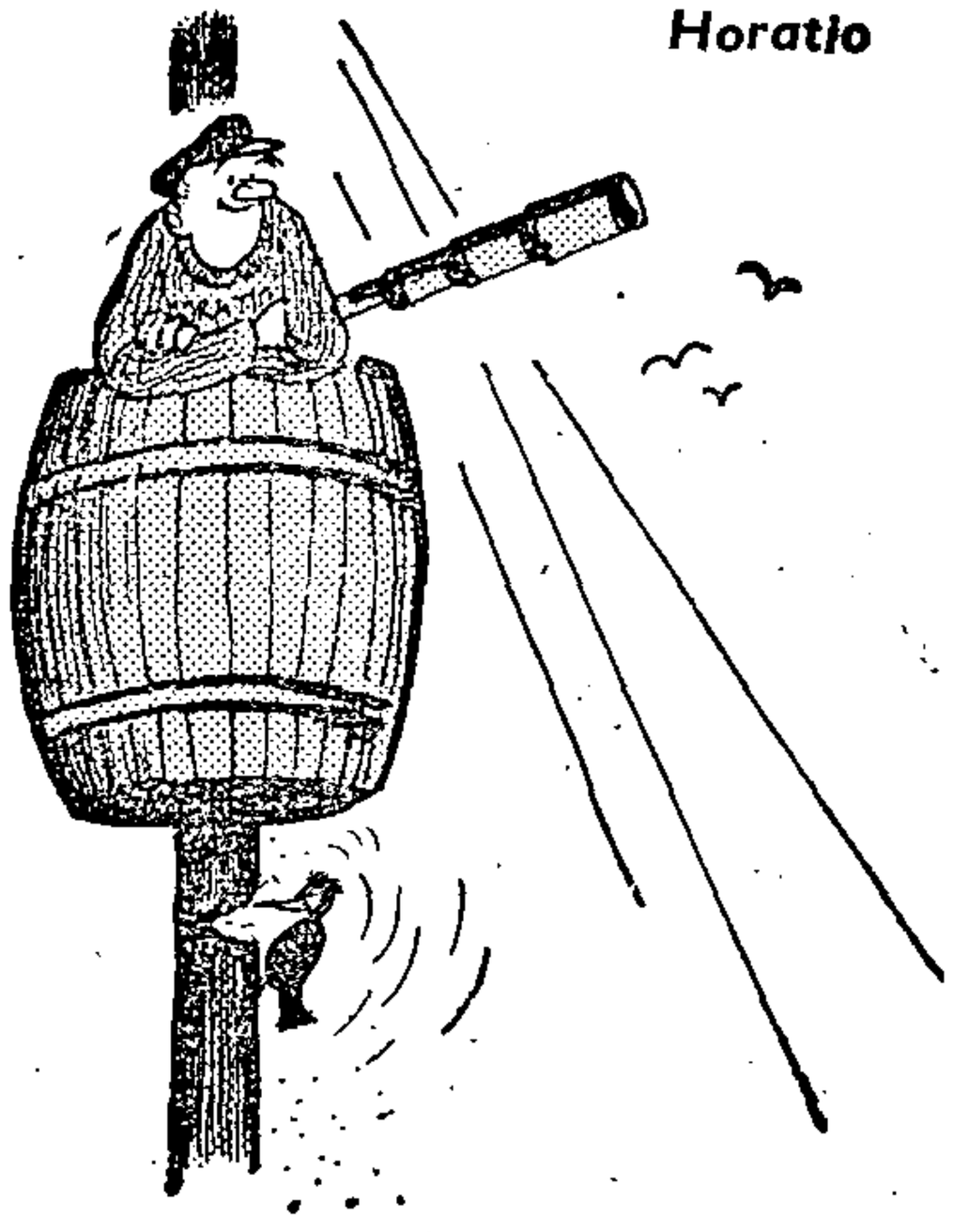
Fortyish, bushy-browed, slightly balding, **Arthur C. Clarke** has the brisk but faraway expression of a man whose interests are divided between the ocean floor and the intergalactic nebulae.

One-time editor of *Science Abstracts*, ex-Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society, he was a wartime R.A.F. technical expert and lecturer on radar; now he lives in Ceylon and operates a two-man deepsea diving and underwater survey unit.

His twenty-first book, just out, is a handsome volume on submarine cable-laying; as well, he has written twelve sf and eight technical books—and, of course, our new story.

Mr. Clarke is brief and to the point about his own activities, but becomes loquacious and enthusiastic on his favourite topic: space. He confidently expects to get to the moon, maybe Mars too. He has a scheme for sending people on three-hundred-year space-trips in cold storage. When we suggested that it was hard on posterity to be landed with us, Arthur Clarke remarked briskly, " What's posterity ever done for us? Let it look out for itself."

JOHN SILVER



# CASE OF SUNSTROKE

*It was so simple, so logical*
*so unbelievable*

## BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

SOMEONE else should be telling this story—someone who understands the funny kind of football they play down in South America. Back in Moscow, Idaho, we grab the ball and run with it. In the small but prosperous republic which I'll call Perivia, they kick it around with their feet. And that is nothing to what they do to the referee.

Hasta del Vista, the capital of Perivia, is a fine, modern town up in the Andes, almost two miles above sea-level. It is very proud of its magnificent football stadium, which can hold a hundred thousand people. Even so, it's hardly big enough to pack in all the fans who turn up when there's a really important match, such as the annual one with the neighbouring republic of Panagura.

One of the first things I learnt when I got to Perivia, after various distressing adventures in the less democratic parts of South America, was that last year's match had been lost owing to the knavish dishonesty of the ref. He had, it seemed, penalised most of the players in the team, disallowed a goal, and generally made sure that the best side wouldn't win.

This diatribe made me quite homesick but, remembering where I was, I merely commented, " You should have paid him more money."

" We did," was the bitter reply, " but the Panagurans got at him later."

" Too bad," I answered. " It's hard nowadays to find an honest man who stays bought." The Customs inspector who'd just taken my last hundred-dollar bill had the grace to blush beneath his stubble as he waved me across the border.

The next few weeks were tough, which isn't the only reason why I'd rather not talk about them. But presently I was back in the agricultural machinery business—though none of the machines I imported ever went near a farm, and it now cost a good deal

more than a hundred dollars a time to get them over the frontier without some busybody looking into the packing-cases. The last thing I had time to bother about was football; I knew that my expensive imports were going to be used at any moment, and wanted to make sure that this time my profits went with me when I left the country.

Even so, I could hardly ignore the excitement as the day for the return match drew nearer. For one thing, it interfered with business. I'd go to a conference, arranged with great difficulty and expense at a safe hotel or in the house of some reliable sympathiser, and half the time everyone would be talking about football. It was maddening, and I began to wonder if the Perivians took politics as seriously as sport.

"Gentlemen," I'd protest, "our next consignment of rotary drills is being unloaded tomorrow, and unless we get that permit from the Minister of Agriculture someone may open the cases and then . . ."

"Don't worry, my boy," General Sierra or Colonel Pedro would answer airily, "that's already taken care of. Leave it to the Army."

I knew better than to retort, "Which Army?" and for the next ten minutes I'd have to listen while an argument raged about football tactics and the best way of dealing with recalcitrant referees. I never dreamt—and I'm sure that no one else did—that this topic was intimately bound up with our particular problem.

Since then, I've had the leisure to work out what really happened, though it was very confusing at the time. The central figure in the whole improbable drama was undoubtedly Don Hernando Dias, millionaire playboy, football fan, scientific dilettante and, I am sure, future President of Perivia. Owing to his fondness for racing cars and Hollywood beauties, which has made him one of his country's best-known exports, most people assume that the playboy label describes Don Hernando completely. Nothing, but nothing, could be further from the truth.

I knew that Don Hernando was one of us, but at the same time he was a considerable favourite of President Ruiz, which placed him in a powerful yet delicate position. Naturally, I'd never met him; he had to be very particular about his friends, and there were few people who cared to meet me, unless they had to. His interest in science I didn't discover until much later. It seems that he has a private observatory which is in frequent use on clear nights, though rumour has it that its functions are not entirely astronomical.

It must have taken all Don Hernando's charm and powers of

persuasion to talk the President into it. If the old boy hadn't been a football fan, too, and smarting under last year's defeat like every other patriotic Perivian, he would never have agreed. But the sheer originality of the scheme must have appealed to him, even though he may not have been too happy about having half his troops out of action for the best part of an afternoon.

Still, as Don Hernando undoubtedly reminded him, what better way of ensuring the loyalty of the Army than by giving it fifty thousand seats at the match of the year?

I knew nothing about all this when I took my place in the stadium on that memorable day. If you think I had no wish to be there, you are quite correct. But Colonel Pedro had given me a ticket, and it was unhealthy to hurt his feelings by not using it. So there I was, under the sweltering sun, fanning myself with the programme, and listening to the commentary over my portable radio while we waited for the game to begin.

The stadium was packed, its great oval bowl a solid sea of faces. There had been a slight delay in admitting the spectators; the police had done their best, but it takes time to search a hundred thousand people for concealed firearms. The visiting team had insisted on this, to the great indignation of the locals. The protests faded swiftly enough, however, as the artillery accumulated at the check-points.

It was easy to tell the exact moment that the referee drove up in his armour-plated Cadillac; you could follow his progress by the booing of the crowd. "Surely—" I said to my neighbour, a young lieutenant so junior that it was safe for him to be seen out with me—"you could change the ref if you feel that way about him?"

He shrugged resignedly. "The visitors have the right to choose. There's nothing we can do about it."

"Then at least you ought to win the matches you play in Panagura."

"True," he agreed. "But last time we were over-confident. We played so badly that even our ref couldn't save us."

I found it hard to feel much sympathy for either side, and settled down to a couple of hours of noisy boredom. Seldom have I been more mistaken.

Admittedly, the game took some time to get started. First a sweating band played the two national anthems, then the teams were presented to El Presidente and his lady, then the Cardinal blessed everybody, then there was a pause while the two captains had some obscure argument over the size or shape of the ball.

I spent the waiting period reading my programme, an expensive

and beautifully-produced affair that had been given to me by the lieutenant. It was printed on art paper, lavishly illustrated, and looked as if it had been bound in silver. It seemed unlikely that the publishers would get their money back, but this was obviously a matter of prestige rather than economics.

In any event there was an impressive list of subscribers, headed by the President, to this SPECIAL VICTORY SOUVENIR ISSUE. Most of my friends were included, and I noted with amusement that the bill for presenting fifty thousand free copies to our gallant fighting men had been met by Don Hernando. It seemed a somewhat naïve bid for popularity, and I doubted if the goodwill was worth the obviously considerable cost. The VICTORY also struck me as a trifle premature, not to say tactless.

These reflections were interrupted by the roar of the enormous crowd as play started. The ball slammed into action, but had barely zigzagged halfway down the field when a blue-jerseyed Perivian tripped a black-striped Panaguran.

They don't waste much time, I said to myself; what's the ref going to do? To my surprise, he did nothing, and I wondered if this match we'd got him to accept C.O.D. terms.

"Wasn't that a foul, or whatever you call it?" I said to my companion.

"Pfui!" he answered, not taking his eyes off the game. "Nobody bothers about that sort of thing. Besides, the coyote never saw it."

That was true. The referee was a long way down the field, and seemed to be finding it hard to keep up with the game. His movements were distinctly laboured, and that puzzled me until I guessed the reason. Have you ever seen a man trying to run in a bullet-proof waistcoat? Poor devil, I thought, with the detached sympathy of one crook for another; you're earning your bribe. I was finding it hot enough, merely sitting still.

For the first ten minutes it was a pretty open game, and I don't think there were more than three fights. The Perivians just missed one goal. The ball was headed out so neatly that the frantic applause from the Panaguran supporters (who had a special police guard and a fortified section of the stadium all to themselves) went quite un-booed. I began to feel disappointed. Why, if you changed the shape of the ball this might be a good-natured game back home!

Indeed, there was no real work for the Red Cross until nearly half-time, when three Perivians and two Panagurans (or it may have been the other way round) fused together in a magnificent mêlée from which only one survivor emerged under his own power. The casualties were carted off the field of battle amid much

pandemonium and there was a short break while replacements were brought up. This started the first major incident: the Perivians complained that the other side's wounded were shamming so that fresh reserves could be poured in. But the ref was adamant, the new men came on, and the background noise dropped to just below the threshold of pain as the game resumed.

The Panagurans promptly scored, and though none of my neighbours actually committed suicide several seemed close to it. The transfusion of new blood had apparently pepped up the visitors, and things looked bad for the home team. Their opponents were passing the ball with such skill that the Perivian defences were as porous as a sieve.

At this rate, I told myself, the ref can afford to be honest; his side will win anyway. And to give him his due, I'd seen no sign of any obvious bias so far.

I didn't have long to wait. A last-minute rally by the home team blocked a threatened attack on their goal, and a mighty kick by one of the defenders sent the ball rocketing towards the other end of the field. Before it had reached the apex of its flight, the piercing shriek of the referee's whistle brought the game to a halt.

There was a brief consultation between ref and captains, which at once almost broke up in disorder. Down there on the field everyone was gesticulating violently, and the crowd was roaring its disapproval.

"What's happening now?" I asked plaintively.

"The ref says our man was offside."

"But how can he be? He's on top of his own goal!"

"Shush!" said the lieutenant, obviously unwilling to waste time enlightening my ignorance. I don't shush easily, but this time I let it go, and tried to work things out for myself. It seemed that the ref had awarded the Panagurans a free kick at our goal, and I could understand the way everybody felt about it.

The ball soared through the air in a beautiful parabola, nicked the post, and cannoned in, despite a flying leap by the goalie.

A mighty roar of anguish rose from the crowd, then died abruptly to a silence that was even more impressive. It was as if a great animal had been wounded—and was biding the time for its revenge.

Despite the heat pouring down from the not-far-from-vertical sun, I felt a sudden chill as if a cold wind had swept past me. Not for all the wealth of the Incas would I have changed places with that referee sweating out there on the field in his bullet-proof waistcoat.

We were two down, but there was still hope; it was not yet half-time and a lot could happen before the end of the game.

The Perivians were on their mettle now, playing with almost demonic intensity, like men who had accepted a challenge and were going to show that they could beat it.

The new spirit paid off promptly. The home team scored one impeccable goal within a couple of minutes, and the crowd went wild with joy. By this time I was shouting like everyone else, and telling that referee things I didn't know I could say in Spanish.

1-2 now, and a hundred thousand people praying and cursing for the goal that would bring us level again.

It came just before half-time. In a matter that had such grave consequences, I want to be perfectly fair. The ball had been passed to one of our forwards, he ran about fifty feet with it, evaded a couple of the defenders with some neat footwork, and kicked it cleanly into the goal. It had scarcely dropped down from the net when that whistle went again.

Now what? I wondered. He can't disallow that.

But he did. The ball, it seemed, had been handled. I've got pretty good eyes, and I never saw it. So I cannot honestly say that I blame the Perivians for what happened next.

The police managed to keep the crowd off the field, though it was touch and go for a minute. The two teams drew apart leaving the centre of the pitch bare except for the stubbornly defiant figure of the referee. He was probably wondering how he could make his escape from the stadium, and was consoling himself with the thought that when this game was over he could retire for good.

The thin, high bugle-call took everyone completely by surprise —everyone, that is, except the fifty thousand well-trained men who had been waiting for it with mounting impatience. The whole arena became instantly silent, so silent that I could hear the noise of the traffic outside the stadium.

A second time that bugle sounded—and all the vast acreage of faces opposite me vanished in a blinding sea of fire.

I cried out and covered my eyes; for one horrified moment I thought of atomic bombs and braced myself uselessly for the blast. But there was no concussion—only the flickering veil of flame that beat through even my closed eyelids for long seconds, then vanished as swiftly as it had come when the bugle blared out for the third and last time.

Everything was just as it had been before, except for one minor item. Where the referee had been standing there was a small, smouldering heap, from which a thin column of smoke curled up into the still air.

What in heaven's name had happened? I turned to my companion, who was as shaken as I was.

"Madre de Dios," I heard him mutter, "I never knew it would do that."

He was staring, not at the small funeral pyre down there on the field, but at the handsome souvenir programme spread across his knees. And then, in a flash of incredulous comprehension, I understood.

Yet even now, when it's all been explained to me, I still find it hard to credit what I saw with my own eyes. It was so simple, so logical—so unbelievable.

Have you ever annoyed anyone by flashing a pocket mirror across his eyes? I guess every kid has; I remember doing it to my teacher once, and getting duly spanked. But I'd never imagined what would happen if fifty thousand well-trained men did the same trick, each using a tinfoil reflector a couple of feet square.

A scientifically-minded friend of mine has worked it out—not that I needed any further proof, but I always like to get to the bottom of things. I never knew, until then, just how much energy there is in sunlight; it's well over a horsepower per minute on every square yard facing the sun. Most of the heat falling on one side of that enormous stadium had been concentrated on the single small area occupied by the late ref. Even allowing for all the programmes that weren't aimed in the right direction, he must have intercepted at least a thousand horsepower of raw heat. He couldn't have felt much; it was as if he had been dropped into a blast furnace.

I'm sure that no one except Don Hernando realised what was likely to happen. His well-drilled fans had been told that the ref would merely be blinded and put out of action for the rest of the game. But I'm also equally sure that no one had any regrets. They play football for keeps in Perivia.

Likewise politics. While the game was continuing to its now predictable end, beneath the benign gaze of a new and understandably docile referee, my friends were hard at work. When our victorious team had marched off the field—the final score was 14-2—everything had been settled. There had been practically no shooting, and as the President emerged from the stadium he was politely informed that a seat had been reserved for him on the morning flight to Mexico City.

As General Sierra remarked to me, when I boarded the same plane as his late chief, "We let the Army win the football match, and while it was busy we won the country. So everybody's happy."

Though I was too polite to voice any doubts, I could not help thinking that this was a rather short-sighted attitude. Several

million Panagurans were very unhappy indeed, and sooner or later there would be a day of reckoning.

I suspect that it's not far away. Last week a friend of mine, who is one of the world's top experts in his specialised field but prefers to work on a freelance basis under an assumed name, indiscreetly blurted out one of his problems to me.

"Joe," he said, "why the devil should anyone want me to build a guided rocket that can fit inside a football?"

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★ ★ ★

## *CATS AND DOGS*

**Cats and dogs may be expected from the sky in February Filldyke but, as well, here's a bonus batch for you to get your teeth and claws into. If it's a case of a bow-wow at a venture, try page 98.**

1. *Can you locate a. the Dogger Bank ; b. the Cattegat?*
2. *Who wrote a. The Cat of Bubastes ; b. The Hound of the Baskervilles?*
3. *When is the Dog Watch? the Dog Days?*
4. *Can you identify: a. Rosa Canina*
   *b. Cat's Tail*
   *c. Cornus Sanguinea*
5. *Who related the original anecdote of the Dog in the Manger?*
6. *Who said, If you call a dog Hervey I will love him?*
7. *What is the connection between a large-spotted nurse hound, and a small-spotted rough hound?*
8. *Which poet's cat a. fell into a tub of gold fishes ; b. was shut in a chest of drawers?*
9. *What was the name of Kipling's servant a dog?*

## *HEADS OR TAILS?*

A contributor to *Country Life* once said that you can make friends with a bull in his stall merely by scratching him, though he added that it is wise to leave his head alone and concentrate your blandishments on his stern; then should you chance to meet him loose in a field he will be the more inclined to present that nether and safer end for further attentions. He also remarks that should the animal become temperamental and over-vigorous in his return gestures, as bulls are prone to do, you need only to get a grip on his tail, and as he takes you for a cross-country run, steer him to a tree or fence where you can part company on easy terms.

ROBERT GIBBINGS, *Till I End My Song*

# HOOFBEATS

*A whistle came from the ridge*
*as the riders swept round the trees*

## BY BRIAN CLEEVE

"BE quiet," Tim whispered. "There's someone coming." He put his hand on the back of my neck and pressed my face into the heather. I could hear it too, then. A low drumming that seemed to come softly from the ground itself—hoofbeats. My brother relaxed his hand and I lifted my head an inch so that I could see between the bent brown twigs and the tight purple buds of the heather, putting my own arm across Sally's neck, and closing my hand on her eyes and muzzle in case she barked.

A hover-fly hung three inches in front of my nose, thin body golden-banded between invisibly-beating gauze wings. Beyond it, a few yards down the slope, lay the cool green mass of the wood, slashed in three directions by wide avenues of turf.

And suddenly the riders were coming. They swept round a turn of the trees; down the nearest avenue, towards us. Great horses, brown as shining chestnut, black and glistening as a lake by moonlight, six of them in line abreast across the wide green ride, coming straight for us, hoofs flashing, legs like the swords of angels; a girl in white and tan, half standing in the stirrups as she gathered her horse to the slope, a man in black, and the others just a blur of figures against the blinding summer sky.

I'm dead, I thought, and dragged Sally as close against me as I could, making one thinness of us. Oh God, I promised, I won't ever mich again if you keep us safe.

I'd have given everything I had, except Sally, to be safe back in school, Miss Dooley and her whangee and all.

And then I couldn't think, or hear, or even scream. The world was only thunder and giant hoofs and crashing in the heather round our ears. I felt Sally twist in my arms like an eel, and I suppose she yelped blue murder but I didn't hear her. I just held her until her ribs must have been near breaking. Until, as suddenly as the hoofs came, they were gone. And there was nothing in the world but quietness, and the faint sound of the hoofs drumming up the low slope of the hill behind us,

knee-deep in heather as they made for the bare turf of the ridge. Even the hover-fly came back as if nothing had happened.

"Holy Mother," said Tim, whistling softly between his teeth. "Are you all right, boy?"

"I don't know," I said, lifting one arm at a time, and then my feet. "Have a look, will you?" Jamey, the porter, who had his leg cut off by the tram, used to tell the fellows that he could still feel his foot was there when it was going to rain. It kind of itched.

A long way behind and above us, from the ridge, there came a whistle, and Sally pricked her ears. I thought it was us being whistled at for a moment, until I saw the dog coming.

A big, slender dog, drifting across the green turf like a greyhound. The way Sally moves, I said to myself, but, even as I tried to believe it, I knew it wasn't true, and that this wasn't like any greyhound I had ever seen. Golden-brown, and fringes of long hair on the legs; a tail like a great feathery plume of pride. And the way he moved. It would make a bird sing to see it, and I held my breath for the beauty of him.

The whistle came again, and the strange dog lifted his head, checked his stride for an instant, and then, like a salmon-spear out of a man's hand, began to race—a brown streak against the green, against the purple. He seemed to skim on the tops of the heather fronds, never bending them, and up to the green again, the smooth turf of the ridge.

For a second I saw him against the sky, head and tail stretched; not low to the ground the way a greyhound or a lurcher races, but carrying himself high, as if he was too proud to bend. Then he was gone. But I think I took my oath that minute that it wouldn't be the last I'd see of him. Not by any means the last.

"Let's get out of here," said Tim. "I'm scared."

And that was a big thing for Tim to say, because he's twenty-two, and the oldest of all of us. I'm fourteen, and come in the middle, but all the others are girls, so really I'm the second of the family. Of the ones that count, I mean.

We'd been going to look for pheasants in the wood when the riders came. It was old Colonel Mortimer's wood, and I suppose they were his pheasants, really: but he lived in England, and Jim Tumulty, the keeper, was as old as the Colonel and had rheumatism, so it didn't matter. As long as I could remember we'd gone into the wood whenever we wanted to. We'd even gone into the Big House sometimes, on a dare. There were huge purple curtains that would choke you with dust when you hid behind them, and big swords on the walls and things like that.

And then, at the beginning of summer, the Americans came.

First a man in a car who said he was an architect, and then a whole crowd of people bringing furniture, and painting the house inside and out, and things like that. Pretty nearly anybody in the village who wanted work could have it for the asking then: digging the gardens, and mending the walls and the windows and the glasshouses, and weeding the drives.

And when the Americans themselves came, it was even better because there was a dark woman with them. A huge, fat dark woman, who wobbled when she walked and talked in a funny way. We couldn't understand what she said most of the time, but we used to follow her when she came down to the village so we could hear her say it. "Gwan, chillun; scram, or ah'll rise welts on yo' backsides wid a hick'ry stick." Things like that. Even Miss Dooley couldn't understand her. And when she talked her chins would shake like seaweed jelly, and the small children would dance round her in a circle.

The rest of the Americans were dull compared with her. There was just a mother and a father and a daughter, and people who came to stay and went away again. Just ordinary people, except they were so rich. The girl with the fair hair that we'd just seen riding was the daughter, and the others were people staying, I suppose. There were always visitors. That was what made it so dangerous going into the grounds now, or the wood. You never knew how many people from the Big House might be moving around.

But I wasn't thinking about that. I was thinking about the strange dog.

Sally whined, and licked my ear as if she knew I was being unfaithful to her; and I kissed her on the top of the head and ran my hands over her belly to tell her that I wasn't. But you can't fool a dog—at least, not a dog like Sally—and she was sad and quiet all the way home. Even when a rabbit started almost under her feet she barely chased it, and came back to us with her head hanging. She's almost a pure-bred greyhound, a fawn brindle, and there isn't anything in the world I love so much, not anything.

But that dog in the wood! It was like an ache under my heart remembering it. Like the time Miss Dooley had taken all the other children to the cinema in Killinchy in a private bus, and hadn't taken me. Just because of the crab I put in her Wellington boot the day before.

I remembered the way the dog had moved, and the lift of his head. And the thought of it was like music playing, like pipes on the hillside.

"Not a word to Mother," said Tim, as we went into the cottage. "But for us being in a hollow of the ground when they rode over us we'd have been dead for sure, or else caught. We'd best leave the old pheasants be for a week or two."

But we were back in the grounds the very next day, although not for pheasants. Tim's girl friend, Sheila Morrissey, was working in the Big House as a maid, and she sent word to him that it was her week for getting a free hour every afternoon, and he could meet her in a certain corner of the wood if he liked. I begged him to let me come along in the hope of seeing the strange dog; and he let me, for fear of what I might say to Mother about him and Sheila if he didn't.

The place Sheila meant was in a little nook of the woods only five minutes' walk from the Big House, and yet hidden from the world. The trees were quiet and still on two sides of it, with the grey stone wall of the estate at the back, and a thick bank of gorse in front. It was like a little sunlit room without a roof, and green turf for a carpet.

Sheila Morrissey was waiting for us when we came, or at least she was waiting for Tim. She didn't look very pleased at all when she saw me and Sally.

"Did you have to bring him?" she said.

"I'm sorry—" Tim started.

"You needn't be sorry," I said. "I've things to do. Better things than watching the pair of you courting."

"Come here," said Sheila, going crimson. "Just come here a second, within reach of my hand."

But I didn't wait. I faded into the trees with Sally. Soft brown leaves under us, and a smell of damp even in the hot summer stillness. The coop-coop of a pheasant somewhere. I was Finn, hunting in the great Forest of Kylemore; my hound, Bran, behind me. But it wasn't Sally in my mind's eye. It was the stranger dog.

I cast down to the edge of the wood. Not the edge against the hill slope where Tim and I had been the day before, but the one facing the Big House. It opened on to a meadow, with a small river running far away to the left and curling round behind the house. Beyond the meadow there were green lawns, and a white stone terrace, and the house itself. And loping across the lawn, the dog. Nobody with him. Nobody even in sight.

I whistled softly, and then louder, and he changed direction and came towards us. Not fast, the way he had when his own master whistled, but drifting easy, curious to see who it was.

I held my breath as he came. You wouldn't see beauty like

that in our village, I can tell you. Nor in Killinchy. He was like a king of faery, struck by enchantment into a hound's shape. A king's head on him. A king's stride. You wouldn't call to that dog, "Come here, boy," or anything like that.

I just waited for him, my heart in my throat and Sally whining at my knee. He came right up to us and looked into my face, and then lowered his head to Sally, saluting her.

"Be quiet, Sally," I whispered, because she has a bad way of snapping at a strange dog sometimes.

If she does it this time I'll die of shame, I thought. But she didn't. Just touched her muzzle to his, as if they were friends at once. And within a minute they were playing together. Sally on all her toes, with her ears laid back, still as a statue for a long second, and then dancing and prancing away from him, and the strange dog after her, running like two winds, chasing in great circles in the meadow.

But I was afraid that they'd be seen from the house, and after a bit I whistled Sally and the stranger into the trees, and we ran through the wood, Finn and his two great hounds after him, that were kings enchanted. It was the shortest hour I've ever known until it was the time for Sheila to be going back and I heard Tim calling me. All three of us went into the little nook where they were, the two dogs running side by side at my heels.

"Abdullah," said Sheila, seeing the dog, and he ran over to her and licked her face. I felt a stab at that, because he hadn't licked mine, but at least I knew his name now.

Abdullah, I said to myself, and then aloud, "Abdullah." And at that he stepped back to me and touched his muzzle to my hand.

"Is there anyone with him?" said Sheila suddenly, her eyes startled with fright at the thought. I shook my head.

"What kind of a dog is he?" I asked her, although I should have known better than to ask a woman.

"I don't know," she said. "Just a dog. He belongs to the Major that's visiting. But he's very friendly. Aren't you, boy? There's a good dog now."

I could have struck her down where she stood, and I pitied Tim from the bottom of my heart. But it was no good showing her my feelings.

"Would you—would you be able to bring him here with you tomorrow?" I said.

"No," she said. "And Tim had better not bring you and that dog of yours, either."

I drew patterns on the grass with the toe of my boot. "Mother thinks Tim is helping Jamey, the porter, over in Killinchy this

minute," I said. " If she knew he was taking the afternoons off this week to meet you, she wouldn't be pleased at all, I can tell you that."

" You tell her," said Tim. " Just you tell her, that's all."

" Why," I said, " I don't want to tell anyone anything. I just want to come here tomorrow and see Abdullah again. Can I? "

Sheila has black hair, but the sort of temper that only red-haired people are supposed to have, and I thought she'd have a fit then and there on the grass. I don't know what would have happened if Tim hadn't held her. But in the end there wasn't anything either of them could do, and I knew it.

" All right," Sheila said at last. " I'll bring him. But only the once, and only if I never have to see you again except at Mass. And if there was two Masses of a Sunday I wouldn't want to see you even then. Do you understand? "

I said I did, although really there was nothing to stop me doing the same thing every day. Mother is a powerful woman and she'd have broken Tim in sticks if she'd known he was spending the afternoon kissing and courting with Sheila Morrissey up in the Colonel's wood instead of trying to earn his living in Killinchy. But I had a plan.

Sometimes plans are very difficult to make and take a long time; but this one came to me all at once, just like rounding the shoulder of a hill and seeing the whole sea and coast spread out at your feet, blue and white and green in the sun. I'd take Abdullah and Sally and we'd run away together. I even knew where we'd get the money to go. At the coursing match the next day over beyond Killinchy.

Even Sally had won five shillings last year at a small meeting. But Abdullah was like the wind itself, and the first prize tomorrow was five pounds. There wouldn't be a dog there to touch him for speed and, although I'd never seen him after a hare, I knew that he'd have the feel of the coursing in him. You'd only to see the way he'd turn in his own length after Sally, nip and gather his feet on an inch of turf and away at a right angle without a check. The hares would get a mortal shock tomorrow when they saw him coming.

I hardly slept that night, and I was up at dawn doing my jobs round the house in case anything stopped my going that afternoon. Mother thought I was sick and nearly had me back in the bed until I explained it was the sermon at Mass last Sunday about honouring thy father and thy mother.

And then it was two o'clock, and Sally and I up the road to meet Tim on his way back from Killinchy. I hadn't been able to

eat, but my lunch was in my pocket and half a crown for Abdullah's entry fee that I'd lifted out of the best teapot. Mother always keeps money there to pay the rent and I'd hoped there'd be five shillings in it so that I could enter Sally as well. But there'd only been half a crown.

Still, you can't have everything; and I danced and sang on the road, and Sally skipped all round me barking, as if she knew that this was a special day, the greatest day in our two lives.

"Hullo," said Tim through his teeth when we met him. "This is the last time, remember."

"The very last," I said, hugging myself with my secret. And there, over the grey stone wall, was Abdullah, lying beside Sheila on the grass; long plume of a tail curved round his slender haunches, his head lifted to watch us as we scrambled over the coping and slid down to the turf.

I had lifted Sally up on to the top of the wall and she leapt down by herself. And it was like lovers meeting to see the pair of them, Sally running to Abdullah, and their two noses almost touching. A long second of greeting and then away with them, round and round the small space of turf, and in and out among the trees.

"Take them away," said Sheila. "But I tell you, if anyone sees you with that dog you'll be in worse trouble than you've ever imagined in your whole life. The Major was saying only this lunch-time that it cost more than his motor car."

"Nobody'll see us," I said. And motor car, I thought. What sort of a man could compare his dog to a motor car? It only went to prove he didn't deserve to have such a dog. But I didn't really think of anything except that I had Abdullah. We went deep into the woods along the wall to a place where I knew there was a fallen log on the inner side.

"Up with you," I whispered to Sally, and she was on top of the log and then on the wall in two bounds. I thought I'd have to show Abdullah what to do, but in half a second he was after her and over, and it was all I could do to follow them fast enough. Because the one danger was anyone seeing them in the road together.

"Go on, Sally," I called softly, "rabbits. Quick, rabbits."

She knew what that meant, and was up the hillside like a flash, with Abdullah at her shoulder. He didn't try to outrun her, just stayed with her, and after a while they broke into a gentle lope. Every now and then Sally would turn her head sideways a little and nip at his long, silken ears, and then dart away from him. But never for very long. In ten strides he'd have caught her again and they'd be side by side.

We went over the hill and along the valley, and over the next hill behind Killinchy, and the world was made of gold and silence and the warmth of the sun. Sometimes a lark lifted out of the bracken and up, up into the blue and silver haze of the sky. Or a bee, drunk with honey, drowsed above the heather. But never another living creature except us three.

I could feel the heat of the sun on my shoulders and the scratch of the heather on my bare legs, and it was as though it was a new world, beautiful and wonderful, and not like the old, ordinary world at all. It was as if Abdullah had brought his great enchantment with him and laid a spell on us. Had made Sally into a fine queen and myself a hero. I thought there wasn't anything in the world I couldn't do.

When we came to the last hilltop I knelt down in the heather and called the dogs to come to me. They came and sat by my side, their tongues hanging, and I pointed down the slope to where, far away, the crowd was already gathered for the coursing.

"*There it is*," I said. "*You'll walk through them. Just* walk through them. And then, oh boys, oh boys, we'll have five pounds and the whole world to spend it in."

Sally whined softly, and I put my arms round her neck.

"Oh Sally," I whispered. "I'm sorry I haven't got half a crown for you, too. But it won't matter, will it? You won't mind when you see Abdullah winning, will you? And the very first thing we'll buy is a new collar for you, ten times better than that miserable old thing we bought with the five shillings you won last year. And a leash. And the biggest bone you ever saw. Won't we, Abdullah?"

She stopped whining at that, and we went down the hill together like the young Finn coming to challenge all the heroes. It was almost a surprise to see nothing but men in caps and ordinary clothes.

I went over to the trestle table where the entries were being taken; and a big heavy man with a red face and a stub of pencil took my half-crown and dropped it into a leather bag without looking at me.

"Name of dog?" he said.

"Abdullah," I told him.

"Ab— what?" he said, looking up. And then he saw Abdullah.

"Janey mac," he said. "What class of a bowler is that, for Pete's sake? *Here, Cassidy, take a look at this, will you?*"

There was already a small crowd round us looking at Abdullah. Sally was frightened and trying to squeeze between my legs, but Abdullah just stood as if no one was there but ourselves. No men

in caps. No greyhounds with broad leather collars and arching backs. Only us.

A big black greyhound on a long leash came forward with its fangs showing, and I readied my boot.

"Get your dog out of that, mister," I said to the man who owned him, "or my dog'll eat him." But I wasn't sure of that any more. I wasn't sure of anything. And then somebody started to laugh.

"Call that a greyhound?" said the man whose dog had snarled at Abdullah.

"Come here," shouted the man with the pencil. "Cassidy, Reilly, come here and look at the bowler. A shaggy mucking greyhound with long hair, honest to God. Come here and look at it."

And the laughter grew, until the whole huge field seemed full of jeering faces, men slapping their legs, shouting themselves hoarse with laughter. Sally cringed at my feet and I stood there helpless, not knowing what to do, wishing I was dead and under the ground. I wish the horses had killed me that time, I thought. I wish they had.

Abdullah came and put his head against my hand, and I stroked his ear between my fingers. "Don't mind them," I whispered. "They just don't understand."

The man with the pencil was wiping his eyes, and the whistle was blowing for the first pair to be slipped. "Tell you what," he said. "You can enter the other one, if you like. At least it looks something like a greyhound."

"It doesn't matter," I said. "We're going now."

I didn't even remember the half-crown, and the fat man didn't remind me. I would have run if I hadn't been too proud. I could hear the sniggers as we went back through that crowd with their miserable, snarling curs that couldn't have caught Abdullah's dust, until at last we were free of them and on the hillside again, alone.

But it was different now. As if the soul had died in the day and left only heat and emptiness. I felt my legs dragging and a kind of thudding in my head, and I didn't want anything but to be beyond sight of the men, to be quite alone.

I didn't even want Sally or Abdullah to be with me. Just to be alone.

Over the brow of the hill I sat down by a grey, smooth boulder and tried not to cry. "You couldn't help it, Abdullah," I said. "It wasn't your fault."

A long way away, at the far end of the valley, a tongue of the sea shimmered, blue as delf.

I'll run away to sea, I thought, anywhere, anywhere. I rolled over on the grass and put my head in my arms. I'm not crying, I thought. Not really crying. I imagined killing the fat man. He would have a spear and a shield and a helmet and armour and I would just have a stick and I'd—

I felt Sally licking at my ear and whining because she was worried at not seeing my face. "Go away," I said. "Go away."

—I'd take my stick, and I'd hit him such a belt on his helmet—it was very hot, so hot—on his helmet. What was on his helmet? So hot.

It was evening when I woke. The sun slanting above the tongue of sea, and the air warm and rich and golden, with a hint of coolness in it. I sat up, wondering for a second where I was and why I was there at all. The coursing. Abdullah. Abdullah! I looked round in a sudden terror, and my heart turned over to see him there, safe, lying beside Sally.

He had his head resting on her flank, and his tail swayed softly like a beautiful thin broom across the grass when he saw me sit up. There wasn't a thought in my head now about running away or anything else. Only to get him back to the Big House before he was missed, and before I was missed and someone added the two of us together. I thought of Sheila. Of my brother, Tim. Of my mother. Of the Major. There didn't seem to be any end to the number of people who'd want to see me about today. Unless I could get him back inside the grounds.

I think we ran the whole five miles back to the wall of the grounds. "Oh please," I said, "let there be nobody on the road." The last sliding quarter-mile down the hillside; the road empty as my pocket.

"Thank God," I whispered. "There you are, Abdullah. Home. Go home." He looked at me, waving his soft tail and lolling his tongue.

I bent down to lift him, and suddenly, far away in another part of the grounds, there was the faintest of whistles. I suppose they'd been whistling here and there all afternoon and evening. And Abdullah heard it and went like the wind for the main gates, with Sally after him. Within two seconds they were both out of sight, and for a moment I almost thought of leaving her. But I knew that I couldn't.

"Sally," I called, "Sally." But I daren't shout too loud.

I began running the way they'd gone. It was a hundred yards to the main gates, and by the time I reached them the two dogs were halfway across the grounds, and the people from the Big House had seen them. There was a little cluster of figures on

the lawn and Abdullah leaping towards them and Sally racing her heart out fifty yards behind him.

"Sally," I called a last time, and then I was seen, too. And there wasn't anything to do except walk across that endless stretch of lawn to where they all were.

I went slower and slower, until they all got impatient and started walking towards me. The man that had been riding in the black coat, and the fair girl, and an old man with grey hair, and a man with a moustache who must have been the Major because Abdullah was leaping at him as if he'd gone mad, bounding round and round him as if there was nothing in the whole world except his master.

And I felt sick in my heart that I'd thought Abdullah would want to come away with me for ever, or that I could have a dog like that. The man with a moustache was so tall and cool and crisp, you could see that the coat on his back would cost a year's wages for anyone like me if I'd had any wages.

Then they were all round me and Sally was under my feet again, the way she'd been at the coursing.

I opened my mouth to say something. But what could I say? And anyway they were all talking at once.

"Quiet everybody," said the Major at last. "Let me talk to him. Where did you find him, my boy? Was he far away?"

I stared at him, not understanding at first. Find. Find? And then it dawned on me. They must have had people looking for him all the afternoon. And they thought I'd found him.

I grinned and swallowed and pointed up the mountainside. "A long way away," I said. "She helped find him," and I patted Sally on the neck.

Heroes? You wouldn't find heroes like us in the breadth of the land after that.

I don't know all that they said, because they're very difficult to understand, but within three minutes Sally and I were in the kitchen, and the fair girl was telling the dark woman to give me everything in the larder if I wanted it, and the Major was half the time praising me and the other half picking burrs out of Abdullah's coat and telling me that he was a kind of dog called a Saluki from Arabia and that there wasn't the like of him in Europe.

The talk and the clatter. The dark woman calling me a "honeychile" and cutting me big slices of cake, and Sally lapping quarts of milk into her until you could see her stomach swelling.

"Well, now," said the Major finally, pulling a little pocket book out of his coat. "I think we ought to give this young man something a bit more substantial than cake. Half the village

looking for Abdullah, and the keepers, and that imbecile of a policeman, and it takes this young lad and his mongrel to find him. Well, well!"

And in that moment Sheila walked into the kitchen and saw me and Abdullah.

"Oh, you villain," she screamed. "Have you brought him back at last? Oh, the black-hearted little wretch—" And then she stopped, feeling the silence spreading round her.

"Brought him *back*?" said the Major. "Brought him back? Do you mean he— Did he take him away in the first place? And did you know about it?"

"I—" said Sheila. "I didn't know— I meant . . ." But she'd said too much already.

"I done believe it's true," said the dark woman. "I done reckernise you now. You all is the worstest of them villain chillun that shouts at me when I goes walking. Yass you are and you done know it. Miss Sophie, I reckon you all caught the culprit now."

"It won't take us long to find out," said the Major coldly. And suddenly I didn't care any more. Not about anything. As if my heart had cracked inside, and nobody could hurt it worse than it was hurt already. I was almost glad they'd found me out, so that there wouldn't be anything to spoil the misery."

"I'll tell you," I said, "as long as you promise not to touch my dog."

"All right," said the Major, and so I told them. How we'd seen Abdullah first, and how I'd dreamt of him, and how I'd thought he'd win the coursing match and the five pounds—I didn't think I needed to say that I was going to keep Abdullah for ever, and Tim says I was quite right there—and then how the men had laughed at him and wouldn't let him run.

They all stared at me as if they were hearing a story until then, not saying a word. But when I told them about the man with the pencil and the red face they started to laugh, too.

"What did he say?" the girl said between two fits of laughing. "What class of a dog is that? Oh, Mike." And she put her head on the Major's shoulder and laughed till the tears ran out of her eyes.

"Is that all?" said the Major at last.

"Yes," I whispered.

"Then go home," he said, "and think yourself the luckiest boy in the world that you haven't the father and mother of all thrashings to take with you. If you'd hurt one hair of Abdullah's head . . ." And he bent down to go on cleaning the burrs out of Abdullah's coat.

"Good night," I said, because after all they had given me a lot of cake, but no one answered.

Maybe they didn't hear me, what with Sheila crying and carrying on that it wasn't her fault, and the fair girl hushing her and telling her that nobody thought it was, and the dark woman shouting about the blueberry pie that I'd been given, and all the milk that Sally had drunk.

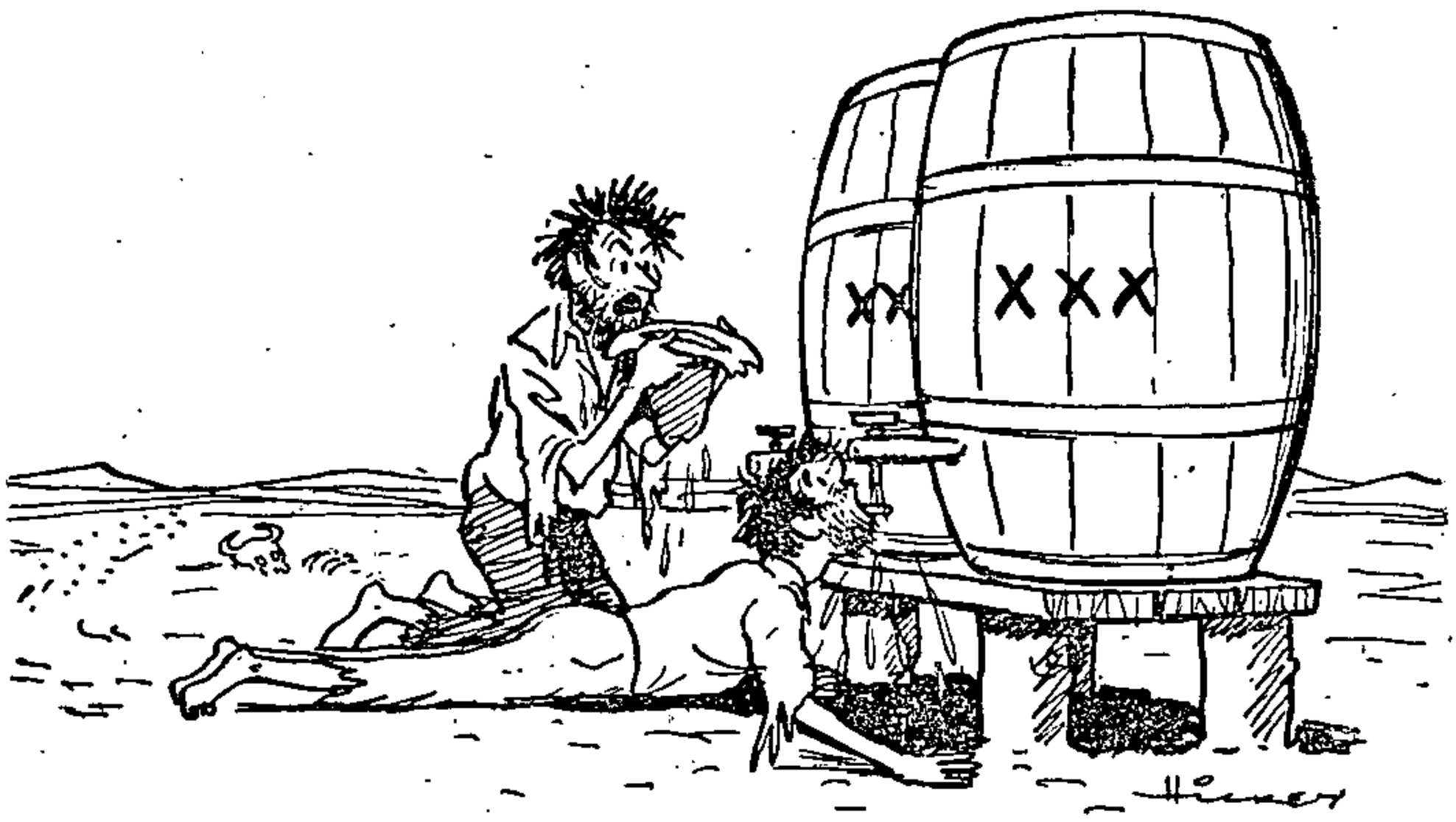
So Sally and I just slipped out of the kitchen door and away home before the Major could change his mind about the thrashing.

But for a long time that night, when my mother had finished with me over the half-crown, and many nights after, I lay awake thinking of Abdullah, and of how the Major had called Sally a mongrel.

I'd bring her into the bed when Tim was fast asleep beside me, and hold her in my arms. "You aren't a mongrel, my darling," I'd tell her, "and anyway it doesn't matter." And we'd talk about Abdullah between our two selves: of the way he walked and held his head, and the softness of his ears.

And maybe that was why, long, long afterwards, when Abdullah and the Major had gone away, and the Americans had gone back to their real home in California for the winter—maybe that was why the miracle happened. Why Sally, who had never had pups in all her life, threw one beautiful golden puppy with ears like fine silk, who grew into the king's image of his father.

As if she had remembered Abdullah the whole long autumn and the winter; kept that one golden afternoon in her heart as I had done, until it was her time.




*"I might have known it was just a mirage—it's only water."*

★ *Sf expert, John Wyndham, turns from the problems of outer space to present a murder mystery from an uncanny new angle—and, as is evident, he is as well versed in legal fact as in science fiction, having tried his hand at the law before deciding writing was his métier.*

# BRIEF TO COUNSEL

## BY JOHN WYNDHAM

"AND that," insisted the clerk of the Court, "is the verdict of you all?"

"Yes," said the foreman of the jury. Then, as if he felt a monosyllable to be inadequate to the solemnity of the occasion, he added, "It is."

The clerk of the Court let his eyes rest upon the members of the jury for a moment, then he turned towards the dock.

"Prisoner at the bar," he said, "you stand convicted of capital murder. Have you anything to say as to why the Court should not proceed to judgment according to law?"

The prisoner regarded his own hands gripping the rail. He looked up. "Yes," he said, and turned towards the Judge. "My lord, I do not understand why the evidence of my witnesses, which is vital to me, has been disregarded."

The Judge leaned forward a little.

"If you consider that an irregularity has taken place at this trial, your remedy lies in an Appeal on those grounds," he explained. "The purpose of this allocutus is to permit you to draw the Court's attention to any irregularity you consider to exist on the face of the record."

"Am I to understand, my lord, that the law completely denies the existence of the power of second sight?" the prisoner inquired.

"Any person professing to tell fortunes is considered in law to be a rogue and a vagabond, and so becomes liable to prosecution under the Vagrancy Act of 1824. Does that answer your question?" asked his lordship.

The prisoner considered. "Not entirely, my lord. Does professing mean *falsely* professing?"

"It means what it says: it means one who claims to be able

to tell fortunes. And I take the profession of a power of second sight to be such a claim."

"But, my lord, I cannot see why I was not given an opportunity to show whether my claim was, in certain circumstances, true—any more than I can see why my witnesses' evidence that I have such an ability was ruled to be inadmissible."

"For the latter, as I have said, your remedy may lie on Appeal." The prisoner and the Judge regarded one another steadily for a moment.

"And now, if—" began the Judge.

"But, my lord—" said the prisoner, simultaneously.

The Judge, mindful that justice should not only be done, but should be seen to be done, checked himself.

The prisoner continued earnestly, "My lord, I am a Midlander, but my parents were not. They came from the Outer Isles. The power of the sight is well recognised there; it was in both their families, and I have it, too. Not always, but sometimes, and with some men, I can see it and feel it—as though the angel of death were hovering near them.

"When I was young I let several of my friends know about it, they are my witnesses; but when I grew older I found that that was unwise, so I did not talk of it.

"On the evening my friend was shot I called at his house. That is why my footprints were there; that is why my fingerprints were found in his sitting-room. I had meant to spend the evening with him, but then, while I was sitting there, I suddenly had the sight. I could see death close, close behind him, reaching out for him, dreadfully near. It is a terrible thing, my lord. I could not tell him, but I could not stay there with him—I could not.

"So I left him, and I went into the inn. I drank because I was distressed for my friend. I drank too much. I'd have said nothing if I had been sober. But I told them he was dead. And although I was drunk I must have impressed them, for two men went off to see what had happened—and they found him dead. But nobody has believed me. Everybody has said, 'You must have been there at the time, or you could not have known . . .'. But I did, my lord. I saw it close upon him.

"All the rest is circumstantial. The footprints, the fingerprints, I have never denied them. The pistol, as I have told you, had been missing for more than a week before it happened; I did not report that because I had no licence for it. His ring—would I put his ring in my desk for anyone to find, if I had done it? The ring was put there to provide evidence against me; and the money, too. He was my friend, my lord. I had nothing

to do with it, except that I saw death so close to him, and knew that it must come very soon. I did not know how. All I ask, my lord, is the chance to prove what I claim . . ."

The Judge shook his head slightly. "The Court has already heard all this. The jury have considered it, and delivered their verdict. If you have nothing further to add, I shall proceed. Well, have you something to add?"

"I have, my lord. I do not wish to do it, but I am left with no alternative."

His eyes left the bench and turned towards the body of the Court where they encountered those of the prosecuting counsel. He hesitated, then he raised his right hand, his finger pointing at counsel.

"That man," he said, "has about twelve minutes to live, God help him."

The Judge frowned.

"That is a thoroughly improper remark," he observed.

A growing murmur in the court was sharply called to order and hushed.

The Judge, looking at the prisoner, remarked, "I cannot imagine what you hope to gain by such impertinence, but if I am right in assuming it to be some form of threat of revenge, you must learn that the course of justice in Her Majesty's Courts is not to be diverted by threats. I shall now proceed to judgment. The sentence of the Court upon you is that you suffer death in the manner authorised by law."

Silence hung over the court.

It was broken by a curious sound from one of the benches. All eyes turned in time to see the counsel for the prosecution loll inertly to one side, and slip from the bench to the floor.

For a moment no one moved, then two barristers jumped forward, and went down on their knees beside the black-gowned figure of their colleague.

Slowly the Judge's head turned back until his eyes met those of the prisoner still standing in the dock. For an instant the two regarded one another.

"Your lordship has about two months," said the prisoner.

Then, as his escort tapped him on the arm, he bowed very slightly to the Judge.

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★ ★ ★

## *IDEALISM*

***If you must cry over spilt milk, condense it.***

# CALCULATED RISK

*The handsome, evil face*
*was lit by the dashboard panel*

## BY NEIL BELL

I HAD just left the R.A.F. where I'd been doing my National Service and had held a temporary commission as a pilot officer. I was twenty-three.

At eighteen, on leaving Repton, I had decided to get my university degree before going into the forces; and in the October, shortly after my eighteenth birthday, I went up to Balliol on a scholarship.

My parents were dead but had left me a trifle; enough to enable me to rub along at Oxford not too disagreeably, provided I curbed my expensive tastes, which I did, often under considerable temptation and strain. This forced asceticism, far from reconciling me to a life of moderation in all things, made me hanker after the fleshpots and determine that one day I would make up for what I had missed. With this determination I had quitted the Air Force, and after a few weeks' holiday to get the civilian feeling again I reviewed my assets in the light of their value as a marketable commodity.

I was well built, healthy, personable, and a good mixer. I had come down with a First in Physics. And I was a first class pilot for, before going into the R.A.F., I had obtained a Civil A licence and had done a great deal of flying during my service. I was a bachelor with no responsibilities.

I decided to capitalise my small income; sell the only property my parents had left me, a largish villa in Hampstead; and then look round for an opening for my money. I did not want to invest it. I did not want to put it into some dreary little business or become a director. I wanted to do something out of the ordinary with it, strike out on a new line.

But what? I hadn't an idea.

I studied the advertisement columns in all the daily and evening newspapers for weeks, but saw nothing that attracted me. They all sounded so familiar, so commonplace, so deadly dull.

Surely, I thought, there must be some out-of-the-way opening for a man with my qualifications. But no. What seemed to be

wanted was the man cut to measure, who would be a smooth, round peg to fit snugly and without friction into that hole which was so exactly like a hundred million others over the world.

Finally I put the following advertisement into the Personal column of *The Times* to run four days consecutively:

> Young man, Repton, Balliol, R.A.F., Civil A Licence. Small capital. Prepared to go anywhere, do anything, right side law.

Nothing happened for a week and I thought I'd wasted a tenner. Then a letter came, asking me to call at a house in Sloane Crescent, Mayfair, at half past three the following afternoon. The letter was typewritten and signed, in both typewriting and autograph, *John Marston.*

I called at the appointed time.

The house was a large one, and the door was opened to me by a manservant to whom I gave my name and said I had an appointment with Mr. John Marston.

He said, " Yes, sir," and showed me into a room leading out of the wide hall. A tall, good-looking, fresh-faced man in his late fifties came forward to greet me with an outstretched hand and a pleasant smile.

I liked the look of him, returned his smile, and took the chair to which he motioned me.

He asked what I would have to drink, offered me a cigarette and a light, and then said, " Tell me something of your flying experience. What did you fly in the R.A.F.? "

" Bombers, jet fighters, helicopters: the whole bag of tricks."

" Yes," he said. " Any particular incidents? "

" The only fairly exciting ones were in the hellies. I flew practically nothing else in my last year with the R.A.F. I was on several rescue operations in the Channel; one particularly difficult, lifting a ditched pilot from his rubber dinghy in a north-easter with blinding snow and sleet."

He showed intense interest, but again merely said, " Yes? "

" The other exciting lift was rather different: a climber with a broken leg on a ridge of rock near the top of Snowdon. There was a lot of wind and driving rain. The youngster—he was not much more than a boy—couldn't help himself, and his companion was the useless sort. However, we managed."

" Any accidents at any time?"

" No."

" You've been lucky."

I smiled. " I've been darned careful. I never took more than the calculated risk one is bound to take when on jobs of that sort. But, of course, one can't rule out luck."

"In your advertisement you used the phrase, 'right side law.' How do you interpret that?"

"Not too rigidly," I said. "Anything short of murder, stealing, treason, or smuggling. I don't want to land myself in gaol."

"That might be a calculated risk, even outside your four categories."

"I'm prepared to take that."

"Good. I think you're the man I want. I must make one stipulation: no questions. I want you to carry out instructions without bothering about the why and the wherefore. Is that acceptable?"

I said it was, and he went on, "How soon can you start?"

I glanced at my watch. "Six this evening."

"That's fine. Very well. I want you to go down to Exeter this evening and take a bedroom and a sitting-room at the Harcourt Hotel. The best they have. Book them for a month with an option for another three months.

"In the morning go to Exeter Airport. There you will find a new Dragonfly helicopter. I will give you all the necessary papers, keys, and permits presently.

"Every day, and I mean every day, unless the weather is impossible, which is unlikely at this time of year, you will take the helicopter up for at least two hours each morning and for the same time each afternoon. Not less than four times each week you will take her up for an hour's flying after dark. Any comments or objections?"

"None," I said.

"Fine. Now for something a little more stringent, or perhaps I should say boring, monotonous. When you are not at the airport or in the air you must be at the hotel. In other words, you must always be available on the telephone, day and night, when not in the air. Well?"

"It will be no great hardship. I read a lot and I'll take books with me in case the hotel's library is limited."

"Have you a car?"

"No; but I can buy one. I have in fact been waiting for the Motor Show."

He waved that aside. "A car will be provided. A new Rover. She's quite beautiful, and her performance superb. She has, as we say, everything. You will be expected to hold yourself in instant readiness day and night for any special flight you are called upon to make.

"You may be at The Harcourt only a few weeks or several months. And now for your fee. You will be paid twenty guineas

a day and all expenses while you are at Exeter. On the successful completion of the special flight to which I have referred, you will be paid five thousand pounds. If it is unsuccessful, half that sum. All payments will be made in notes. I think that is everything. If you'd like time to think it over, I'll give you twenty-four hours."

"It's not necessary," I said. "I accept. And thank you for the opportunity."

"You may thank me when it's over and done with," he said, smiling faintly, "and I shall then owe you more thanks than I shall be able adequately to express."

The Rover was all he had said. That evening, as I sped down to Exeter, I thought a great deal about the strange undertaking I was embarked upon. I would have thought it a smuggling job, had Mr. Marston not given me his word it was not. I did not for a moment doubt his word. I know it is often said that a crook or a confidence man who really knows his job can trick anyone into believing him, but I have never found that true, and I have met some dubious types. My experience is that a man's face reveals the man himself, if you observe it carefully enough. I was certain Mr. John Marston was not a liar; that he was completely honest and to be trusted utterly.

A month slipped away, every day of which I carried out the schedule laid down for me. During that period Mr. Marston telephoned me a dozen times: three times at night and five times during the day at the hotel; four times at the airport, when I came down from a flight, I was told that Mr. John Marston had telephoned me from London, and would I ring him at once. On each occasion he simply asked me how I was getting on, listened without interrupting, said, "That's fine," and rang off.

Five weeks went by; six, seven weeks; two months. But one chilly, November morning, dull and misty, when I landed from my routine flight, Mr. John Marston was waiting. He told me to be ready to make a flight at half past four that afternoon. He would accompany me as navigator, but would not go up with me from the airport. He would be picked up at a spot to be arranged.

At once, as if he had told me in so many words, I knew what was afoot. Perhaps it was the now slowly thickening mist that brought me enlightenment. We were going to lift an escaped prisoner from Dartmoor.

I drove him in the Rover back to The Harcourt where we had a good luncheon, both of us drinking only a tonic water and nothing with our black coffee.

We talked of this and that, of everything except the one topic that I had no doubt was filling his thoughts as it was mine.

The phrase, " right side law," recurred to me over and over again. I made no attempt at self-delusion. I knew that what I was going to do was against the law, and that the penalty the law exacted for such an offence might be a long term of penal servitude.

I should be fully justified, even at this eleventh hour, in refusing to embark on this perilous undertaking.

But I felt I couldn't withdraw now. I did not attempt to justify my conduct to myself by any trumped-up pity for a man in gaol, or by mentally mumbling some specious claptrap about every prisoner having the right to try to escape. I didn't think about the gaoled man at all. He might be a thorough scoundrel deservedly imprisoned, or a poor devil wrongfully convicted, but he did not trouble me at all. I didn't consider him.

The man I was concerned with was Mr. John Marston. I liked him a lot. I thought him honest and sincere. A thoroughly good sort. I believed in him. At this eleventh hour, having taken his pay for so long, I couldn't let him down. If I bungled the job and was caught—well, that was that.

I was anticipating a pretty tough affair with the probability of a smash and someone being killed, but it was all as easy as kiss your hand: the simplest, quickest, and easiest lift I'd ever made in some hundreds of operations.

When I'd picked up Mr. Marston about thirty miles away from the airport, we made for the moors, for Dartmoor. It was now dark and very misty. Marston asked if I was familiar with the topography of the moor, and I said I wasn't. He said it didn't matter, as he knew it like his face in the mirror, and that we were making for the disused Vitifer tin mines which lay about half a mile off the main road and about sixteen miles from the prison.

We were there at six. " Wait for a signal and then go down and get ready to lift," Marston said.

Almost immediately I saw a torch flash murkily through the thick mist. I dropped slowly to within thirty feet of the ground, and let down the rope ladder. Within a minute, a man in prison clothes had climbed into the cockpit.

In the light of the dashboard panel I saw his face clearly for a moment. I knew I should never forget it. It was the face of a man, young and handsome, yet with something of the look of a bird of prey: vulturine, obscene.

He ignored me, and said to Marston as we began to rise quickly, " So you've made it."

" Yes, my boy," Marston said. And I knew that here were father and son. " The first hurdle's over. The others will be far easier."

That was all they said until I dropped them some hundred miles from Exeter where I could dimly see in the darkness a large car waiting.

Before he climbed out, Mr. John Marston gripped my hand and held it a long moment. "All my thanks," he said. "Thank you, thank you; and good luck."

When I finally touched down at Exeter Airport I found, as I had expected, the police waiting for me.

I was grilled hour after hour, both then and later, but I stuck to my tale that I'd been out merely on one of the routine flights I'd been engaged on for the past nine weeks.

Asked why this flight had lasted quite twice as long as any previous routine flight, I said I'd made an error of navigation and lost my way.

I said I'd no knowledge of a prisoner's escape from the prison. At this, one of the interrogating officers looked at me searchingly and said, "Neville Burley escaped from Princetown at half past two this afternoon."

I could not repress a faint exclamation. The Neville Burley case had made the headlines about a year earlier. He had strangled a young woman. It was a brutal murder and there had been details which horrified the public. Had not hanging then been in abeyance, Burley would undoubtedly have gone to the gallows.

But I persisted in my story, and could not be shaken. I pushed Burley and his beastly crime out of my mind. I'd not done it for him, but for John Marston. Father and son. Like father, like son, the old saw says. No two human beings could have been more unlike than Neville Burley and his father.

In the end the police gave up, and I was allowed to return to London. I was anxious about Marston and his son. They had yet to get out of the country and might be picked up. I knew nothing of their plans. But as the weeks became months I felt pretty sure they were safely away.

I sold the helicopter, and with the money paid me by Marston I had now substantial capital, for the locked suitcase he had left with my luggage at the hotel contained in notes not the promised five thousand but double that sum. What I did with it is another story and this present one is not quite finished.

Five years after I had lifted Neville Burley from the Vitifer tin mine shaft-head I was taking a holiday on the Riviera, staying at The Carlton, Juan-les-Pins. Coming up from the beach one morning for my apéritif I noticed, as I sat down at my umbrella'd table on the hotel terrace, a party of three at a table

nearby. A very beautiful young woman, a very good-looking little boy of about three or so, and a youngish man.

The man was Neville Burley.

I was certain of it. There was the handsome, evil face I had seen momentarily in the light of the dashboard panel. As I sipped my drink I watched him and the young woman. They seemed to be very much in love, and fond of the little boy who ran first to one and then to the other for a caress.

Obviously husband, wife, and child. But I had to make sure. Presently I strolled over to their table and said to Burley, "I think we've met before."

He looked at me coolly. "You're mistaken," he said, "but sit down and have a drink."

I sat down. While I drank a Pernod he introduced his wife to me, and the little boy, John, climbed on my knee.

I stayed just long enough to finish my drink and then I excused myself. I wondered what this charming young woman would have thought had she known her husband was the man who had but six years earlier committed so horrifying a murder; and I wondered, too—but I wondered many things. After all, it wasn't my business, although I wished I'd been able to ask after that fine man, his father.

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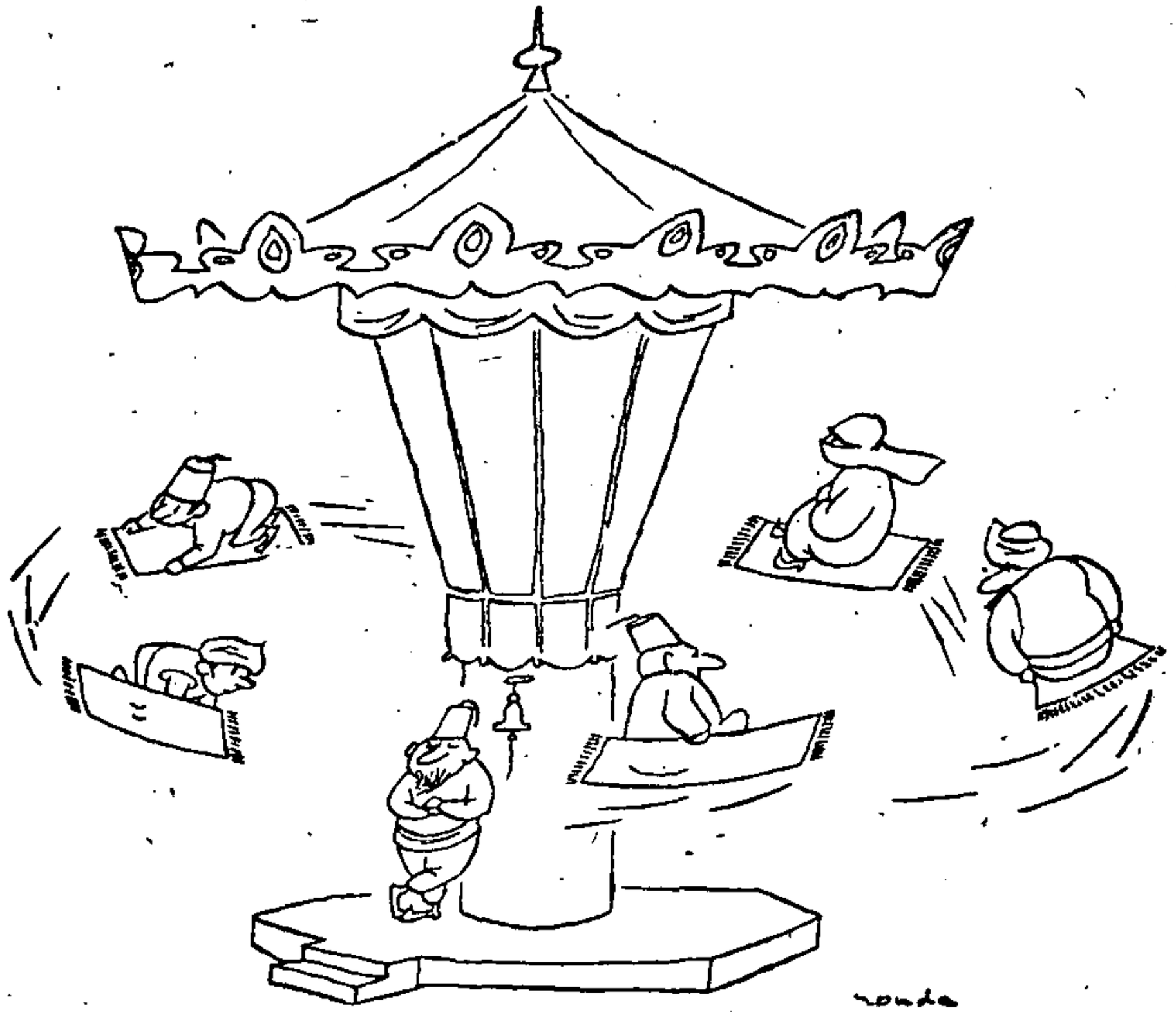

**The shadow of the dome of pleasure**
**Floated midway on the waves . . .**

S. T. COLERIDGE, *Kubla Khan*

*These dragons (their tails, you remark,*
*Into bunches of gillyflowers grew)—*
*When Noah came out of the ark,*
*Did these lie in wait for his crew?*
*They snorted, they snapp'd and they slew;*
*They were mighty of fin and of fang,*
*And their portraits Celestials drew.*
*In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.*

*Here's a pot with a cot in a park,*
*In a park where the peach-blossoms blew,*
*Where the lovers eloped in the dark,*
*Lived, died, and were changed into two*
*Bright birds that eternally flew*
*Through the boughs of the may, as they sang:*
*'Tis a tale was undoubtedly true*
*In the reign of the Emperor Hwang.*

ANDREW LANG, *Ballade of Blue China*

## *Too Disturbing*

They came to a village called " Stripy Bamboos." It is " surrounded," writes Yuan Mei, " by high hills and boisterous waterfalls. There are over twenty ' houses with green upper-storeys,' (brothels) built against the side of the hill. They seemed to be chiefly inhabited by a bevy of young girls, who were now, with mountain flowers stuck in their hair, washing clothes by the stream-side. We sat on a rock by the stream and talked to them. They were not in the least shy, but were also not at all coquettish.

They were in fact singularly fresh, agreeable young people. When their bright combs and hairpins flashed against the grey clouds they did really look more like fairies than human beings." Lin (his young companion) took a fancy to a girl called Chiang and stayed the night with her. " But before dawn he turned up where I was lodging, with his clothes thrown loosely over his shoulders, complaining that the noise of the waterfalls all round prevented him from sleeping."

ARTHUR WALEY, *Yuan Mei*

## *Balanced—*

*Lack of bamboo makes one vulgar*
*Lack of pork makes one thin,*
*In order to avoid vulgarity and slenderness*
*Have pork with bamboo shoots now and again.*

SUNG TUNG-PO

## *—Unbalanced*

*Fu-I loved the green hills*
*And the white clouds.*
*Alas he died of drink.*
*And Li-Po*
*Also died drunk.*
*He tried to embrace a Moon*
*In the Yellow River.*

DENIS JOHNSTON

## *Imperial Preference*

He said: " Sit down again. You have guessed rightly, for the Emperor desires your presence . . . "

" When? " she asked as she sat down. " It is early for such an invitation." He laughed. The girls in the Pepper Rooms had begun to make the noises which denote a game or a quarrel.

" The dew descends upon the grass," he replied, " and serves as clock to the glow-worm. If you, who care no grain of rice for an invitation which others in the aviary yonder would barter against their eyebrows, cannot so arrange the hour of your arrival as to space it between awkwardness and awkwardness, you are not whom I think . . . "

" I will use the glow-worm's discretion," she answered. She uselessly set a hair in place, powdered her knees and followed.

KEITH WEST, *Ma Wei Slope*

## *Just in Time*

On the day of the Flower Festival, when I was still asleep in my bed, my mother pierced a hole in the lobes of my ears. The pain awakened me from my dreams and I found two pieces of red thread looped in my ears.

"Well, of the three important things, I have done two of them for you," my mother said very triumphantly. What she thought to be the three important things for a girl were first to bind her feet, second to pierce her ears, and third to marry her off.

"Yes. There only remains one thing to do, and that is to kill me," was my angry reply to her, which resulted in my having a severe scolding.

HSIEH PING-YING, *Autobiography of a Chinese Girl*

## *Too Late!*

*I watched your red lips move*
*In song,*
*And your jade-like fingers pluck*
*The stringed lute.*
*Love urged me on—*
*To enter,*
*Take you in my arms,*
*Make you my own.*
*But I blushed, I trembled,*
*I dared not move—*
*And now*
*It is too late!*

TZU YEH, *Through Your Window*

## *Afterthought*

When a woman's lips say, "It is enough," she looks at you with her eyes and they say, "Again."

*Chinese Proverb*

# IMPOSSIBLE THIEF

*" Look closely at the eyes," said Colonel Rivas*

## BY HUGH B. CAVE

CERTAIN advertisements in the magazines always remind me of Mr. Gerald Brightman, and make me wonder what would happen if that delightfully original gentleman were ever to send in a testimonial.

He never will, of course. He just isn't the sort to seek publicity. But if he did, and if some bright young executive saw fit to use his statement, the advertisements in question would be refreshingly different.

Allow me to explain.

He arrived in San Marlo City one wet, July afternoon and came by taxi to The Papagayo, having chosen my modest place, he confessed with charming frankness, because it was inexpensive. The Papagayo is not the least expensive hostelry in San Marlo City, you understand, but we do believe in substituting homely comfort for the frills of certain gaudier establishments, and charge accordingly.

He decided on a small but adequate third-floor room and, having climbed the rather steep stairs that led to it, collapsed on to the bed with a sigh. He was feeling a bit shaky, he said; the plane had been bumpy. He looked ill, and so pathetically thin that I felt like a bull beside him. When asked if there was anything he might like in the way of refreshment, he patted his pale and wistful face with a neatly-folded handkerchief and gazed sadly at me.

" Doesn't my name mean anything to you, Senor Moncada? Think, please. Gerald Brightman."

I thought and shook my head. " I am sorry."

" It will to the police." His sad eyes looked past me to the open door, as though he expected men in uniform to come rushing in upon us. " I do wish I might speak to someone in authority before there is any of the usual unpleasantness."

I was puzzled. He was about forty-five, perhaps a year or two younger, and wore an inexpensive tropical suit, a wrinkled white shirt, black shoes, rimless glasses, and a grey tie with just

a hint of pink in it. Rather startling, that touch of pink, like a sly wink. I would have guessed him to be a schoolmaster on holiday.

"I do not understand," I said.

He smiled wanly and shook his head. In his mild, underfed way he was really quite attractive. "Gerald Brightman, the other Gerald Brightman, is well known to the police. He goes about stealing things."

"The other Gerald Brightman?"

"There are two of us. Oh, we don't look a bit alike, really, but as soon as my name is spotted on a list of arrivals I'm in for it. It even happens at the airport sometimes, if I have the bad luck to bump into an alert immigration or customs official."

"And he—this other man—is a thief?"

"A very famous one, believe me. Why, I've been told that the police of half a dozen Caribbean countries are after him. So you see—" he patted his face with the handkerchief again—"it really is awkward."

I smiled. "Then you have come to the right place." And I told him how Colonel Francisco Rivas, of the San Marlo Police, stopped at The Papagayo every afternoon on his way to La Palma de Oro. "He should be here within the hour," I said, consulting my watch. "It will be the simplest thing in the world for you to speak to him."

"Does he have real authority?" Mr. Brightman asked, with pathetic eagerness. "I mean, I would be awfully grateful, of course; but he won't have to take me to a dozen higher-ups, will he? It's the most fatiguing business when I don't start near the top. Believe me, I know."

"Colonel Rivas is the head of our police force, senor."

"It's terribly kind of you."

Colonel Rivas came across the plaza from his office just after six o'clock, as was his custom: a tall, muscular man, handsome in his spotless uniform. He greeted me with his usual nod—a hotel-keeper, of course, was rather beneath his dignity—and made his way to our little bar. For the sake of our new guest I had put out a bottle of Scotch that I had been saving, a special brand. The Colonel spotted it at once and pounced upon it with a happy smile.

We employ no barman at The Papagayo, you understand. We are too small to need one. When in a mood for refreshment, our guests simply go to the bar and select what they wish. A pencil and slips of paper are provided. A guest is expected to make a note of what he has consumed, sign his name, and pay for the drinks later.

Colonel Rivas was a most interesting man. As the head of

our police organisation for the past three years he had become enormously wealthy. His home in the suburbs was a showplace filled with objets d'art, some of them considered priceless. When the votes were counted in the forthcoming election, in five weeks' time, he would without a shadow of doubt become president of the republic.

But he was a bachelor. He dined every evening at the expensive and elegant La Palma de Oro. And to save the price of his before-dinner cocktails at La Palma, he invariably stopped at The Papagayo.

Day after day, he consumed my best Scotch or bourbon, which in San Marlo are expensive. Day after day, he carefully wrote on his chit, *One rum. F. Rivas.* Of course, I never sent him a bill. I may be only an inn-keeper, but I am not altogether a fool. I found it amusing to watch him play his little game at the bar.

That afternoon, when he had poured his second drink, I approached him and told him about our interesting new guest on the third floor.

He scowled at me, his black eyes aglitter with suspicion. "This is odd, Bernardo," he said. "We were given to understand months ago that the notorious Gerald Brightman had retired and was living peacefully in San Nicolas, where he had found asylum through generous gifts to charity. What does this guest of yours look like?"

I described the man.

He extracted a photograph from his wallet. "Is this he?"

I had to laugh. "Let me introduce him to you. Then you will see for yourself."

The Colonel laughed, too, when I led my underfed guest across the hall a moment later. "Senor, do not concern yourself," he said. "You have nothing to fear in San Marlo. It will be my pleasure to issue a directive. My men will not trouble you."

"I have had endless trouble elsewhere in the Caribbean," the poor man sighed.

"The police of other countries must be stupid, then. Have you ever seen this namesake of yours?"

Mr. Brightman shook his head. "No, I'm afraid I haven't."

"Look at this." Colonel Rivas chuckled, showing him the photograph.

When the thin man had recovered from his astonishment, he joined in our laughter. "Good heavens! He's fat as a pig and has a face like—like a balloon. He must weigh three times as much as I do."

"He weighs seventeen stone. He has bushy, black hair and

brown eyes. The information is here on the back of the photograph. Your hair is skimpy and the colour of dust, if you will excuse my saying so, and your eyes—" Rivas leaned forward—"well, you have brown eyes, of a sort. But so have millions of other men." He patted Mr. Brightman on the shoulder as one pats a frightened child. "What are you, senor? A schoolmaster?"

"I have a little bookshop in New York. I—" Mr. Brightman plucked some papers from his inside coat pocket, fumbled through them, and handed the Colonel several with a printed letterhead. "I specialise in books on Latin America, you see. That's why I'm here. Some of my clients—"

"Go and call on Senora Marroquin," the Colonel advised. "She has rooms full of old books. Old paintings, too." He patted the book-dealer's shoulder again and turned away. "Here in San Marlo, senor, you need not be alarmed about your name. Have no worries."

When the Colonel had departed, Mr. Brightman turned to me in astonishment. "Why, he—he believed me! He didn't even ask for my passport."

"Colonel Rivas is a man of great perspicacity," I said, not feeling it necessary to add that in my opinion he was also a thorough blackguard and would make a very bad president. "Well, now, that's settled, eh? If there is some other way I can be of service—"

"This woman he mentioned," he murmured hesitantly, as though reluctant to ask another favour. "Who—do you know who she is, Senor Moncada?"

"Senora Marroquin? She is the widow of a wealthy merchant. An old, sharp-tongued woman who lives, as Rivas said, surrounded by her books and treasures."

"Dear me," he said. "She sounds formidable."

"Perhaps not so formidable, if you go about it in the right way." I was amused by the feeling within me that I must assist this poor, helpless collector of books. "We'll talk about it later, eh? Something can be done, I'm sure."

It became clear very soon that Mr. Brightman would need all the assistance he could get. For one thing, he obviously was not well. He came to the table at mealtimes but ate almost nothing, and when I asked if the food displeased him, he said that his stomach hurt.

"I have had a sensitive stomach for years," he sighed. "Pay no attention to me, Bernardo. It is not your food. The food is fit for a king."

"You should eat more than you do," I protested. "No man can live on the little you consume."

"I manage somehow."

He did manage, but only just. Watching him, I was certain he suffered spells of dizziness. He would be walking across the hall and suddenly clutch at a chair to steady himself, then carefully sit and remain motionless for moments at a time, his thin face startlingly white and his hands gripping his knees. Or, having returned from a tour of the city's bookshops, he would make his way to the kitchen, struggling for breath and dripping with perspiration, ask if he might have a glass of fruit juice, and gulp it down as though his life depended on it.

A truly sad case. I felt sorry for him.

At last the American girl, Thelma West, paid us the visit I had been waiting for, and I introduced them.

Miss West had come to San Marlo a year before to study painting at our famous Instituto de Arte, but her funds had run out and she had accepted a post as companion to Senora Marroquin. A lovely girl. She visited The Papagayo the first time to try our food, which is, I say with pride, the best in San Marlo City. Thereafter she called in at least once a week and became a great friend of my wife.

"Hunger brought her and friendship brings her back," my Beatriz would say happily.

She was in her late twenties, I think—one does not ask a young woman her age—and of course she was plump, but not so plump that a man would turn away after noticing her fine, clear skin and good, honest eyes, and hearing her merry laugh. "I ought to lose twenty pounds," she would say to my wife. "And would, too, if I ate only what Senora Marroquin exists on. That woman is a humming-bird."

Ah, these women. Always talking of what they should lose or gain, as though the fate of the world lay in the balance!

When introduced to the book-collector, Thelma was his friend at once, as I had anticipated. She was his friend because he was a walking skeleton and she pitied him. A powerful force, pity. More powerful, I sometimes think, than love. We had dinner together in the garden, the four of us, and she watched him attentively. I saw her frowning as he picked at his food.

"Mr. Brightman," she said at last, "you may think your problem is finding certain rare books, but I think you have a more serious one. Really, I do. Your problem is your stomach, and I'm going to do something about it."

"Do something, Miss West?" he said, startled.

"I have some pills at home: just the thing to help you. Why, you're starved."

"I do feel terribly hungry at times," he admitted wistfully.

Thelma must have liked or pitied him very much for, then and there, with a steaming platter of mole de guajolote untouched before her, she pushed back her chair. "I'm going for them straight away," she said. "You just carry on without me."

Mr. Brightman fluttered his frail hands. "No, no. I won't hear of it."

"Nonsense. I have my car. I'll be back in ten minutes."

"But your dinner—"

"Ten minutes won't spoil my dinner." She patted him on the shoulder as Colonel Rivas had. "Oh, all right, come along with me, then. I'll introduce you to Senora Marroquin. It might help you with your book-hunting."

Their dinner had become cold when they returned more than an hour later, but they were chattering away like children, obviously delighted with their discovery of one another. The pills, Thelma said, had begun to work already.

It wasn't the pills at all, Mr. Brightman joked; it wasn't even the invitation he had received from Senora Marroquin to call on her tomorrow and talk about books; it was Miss West's kindness, pure and simple.

"The pills," Thelma insisted, seating herself to the substitute dinner our cook had provided.

"You, my dear," Mr. Brightman murmured with a smile. "And since you have the evening off, I insist on taking you somewhere to show my gratitude."

Thelma gazed at him with affection. "All right. I'd like to see the new Italian film at the cinema. I really would."

"It will be my pleasure."

Theirs was the strangest romance. As their friendship deepened, Thelma became more breezy and bustling than ever—a merry cyclone that had us gasping for breath—and poor Mr. Brightman appeared to be exhausted by her frantic efforts to improve his health. He did eat a little more under her coaching, but not much. "Heavens, I can't manage a cure all at once, even when stuffed full of pills," he would say helplessly.

But he needn't have been alarmed. What small energy he derived from the increased consumption of food was used up in his pursuit of books. He had come to San Marlo, after all, to find books.

Senora Marroquin found him interesting, and he called on her several times. She might consider selling him some of her

precious volumes, she said, but he must be patient; it would take time for her to reach a decision as to price. He spent hours in the city bookshops searching through mountains of dusty tomes in back rooms. Sometimes Thelma accompanied him.

"Isn't he the most wonderful man?" Thelma said to my Beatriz. "I could just love him to pieces!"

"I should think a good hug would cripple him for life," Beatriz joked.

"Oh, come now, I'm not that fat."

"Of course you are not fat, darling. You are just the way the men of San Marlo like their women, pleasingly plump in the proper places, and strong enough to look after them. But our Mr. Brightman—your Mr. Brightman—is as fragile as a cocktail glass."

"I'll fatten him up then. You just wait."

"Will there be time? He said, when he came, that he would be here only a fortnight. This is the eleventh day."

Thelma smiled innocently at the ceiling. "He'll be here longer than a fortnight," she predicted.

"Because he is fond of you?"

"Because he wants some of Senora Marroquin's books, and she has promised me not to let him have them until I say the word."

The book-collector had been with us eighteen days when Colonel Rivas came in to see me one morning, resplendent in his medals. It was an unusual time of day for the Colonel to be calling, and when he sat down and motioned me to do the same, I was alarmed.

"Bernardo, I have a question or two."

"My cook has thrown another veal chop at the meat-market man?"

"It isn't your cook; it is your guest with the notorious namesake." He drew a pair of photographs from his pocket and passed them to me.

"These came yesterday from Manigua: more recent photographs of the infamous Gerald Brightman than the ones in our files. They disturb me, and so does the information that he may have left San Nicolas and be active again."

I studied the photographs and tried to imagine what this Gerald Brightman of San Nicolas might look like if someone were to melt pounds of flesh off him and shrink his jolly, balloon-shaped face.

"The eyes," Colonel Rivas said. "Look closely at the eyes."

"There is a faint resemblance. Only a very faint one."

"Nevertheless, I have a feeling."

"Why should a man of his talents bother himself with San Marlo?" I demanded. "What have we that is worth stealing?"

The Colonel stood up. "Who knows what interests such a man? Where is he now?"

"At the beach, with Miss West."

"I should like to have a look at his things."

I disapproved, but what could I do? Upstairs I stood in the doorway while he searched the room. He certainly was efficient. If our Mr. Brightman possessed so much as a tie-pin that the Colonel did not uncover, I have no idea where it could have been hidden.

But to Rivas the search was a disappointment. "Titles of books," he muttered, shrugging over scraps of paper. "Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of people in New York—clients, I suppose. Nothing here to indicate that he came from San Nicolas or is even aware that such a country exists on our border.

"Well—" he began putting things away—"that's that, for the time being. I have investigated his activities here, of course. When he is not with your friend, Miss West, he is certainly sniffing about after old books."

He seemed unhappy, and I wondered why. It was not until some time after he had gone that I understood. In a fortnight's time there would be the election. What a feather in the cap of Colonel Rivas if he could announce the capture of that notorious Gerald Brightman! Although, of course, Rivas would be elected president in any case.

When Mr. Brightman and Thelma returned from the beach, I simply could not bring myself to mention the Colonel's visit. Thelma was radiant, and her little book-collector beamed with happiness. They had had the most wonderful time, they said. Hours of complete relaxation in the sun, a picnic lunch, then a delightful ride through the countryside.

"I feel like a new man," Mr. Brightman declared, "and I have this lovely, lovely girl to thank for it."

"The sun," Thelma said.

"You," he insisted, putting his arm about her. "You alone."

Then he went to his room to change for dinner, and returned with a face full of sadness.

"They didn't believe me," he said, his mild, brown eyes gazing at me in unhappy accusation. "And I was so sure this time, after my delightful talk with Colonel Rivas—"

I explained the circumstances as best I could. "It's because the other Gerald Brightman has left San Nicolas. But how in the

world did you know your room had been searched? The Colonel put everything back with the utmost care."

"I always know, Bernardo."

His sigh was so lugubrious that Thelma took his hand. "Never mind," she said. "We won't let it spoil your dinner, darling."

"I—I'm really not hungry."

"You need your strength." And she led him firmly to the dining-room.

Mr. Brightman did not sleep well that night.

I stayed up late, reading, and when I made the rounds to be sure the hall windows were shuttered, I saw a light under his door, and heard him pacing up and down. I thought of taking him a little sugared rum and telling him not to worry about Colonel Rivas' disturbing visit—after all, the Colonel was an ambitious man who wished to be president—but I decided against it. An innkeeper must respect the privacy of his guests.

The following day I saw little of him, and when we did happen to meet he seemed strangely preoccupied. About four in the afternoon he went out. Returning at six, he had dinner; such a dinner as I had never seen him devour before: fruit, arroz con pono, vegetables, a sweet-potato pudding, coffee, and a brandy. About eight he drank another brandy at the bar and winked at me, just as the pink spots on his tie had seemed to wink at me that first day. Then he went to the telephone and rang up Thelma.

I did not hear all the conversation. It seemed he had found a book of some sort, a very rare and wonderful one, in the shop of Eufrasio Sigueiros. It was a volume that Senora Marroquin passionately wanted for her collection. Thelma must take the Senora to the shop and Mr. Brightman would meet them there. On his way, he would pick up the proprietor at the latter's home. The proprietor was expecting him, and would be waiting.

He then turned to me. "Bernardo, may I borrow your car? I must go to Sigueiros' bookshop, a most important appointment, and you know how it is with the taxi drivers at this hour. They are all running to the theatres and dances."

"Certainly," I said.

He caught my hand and squeezed it. The good dinner and brandy had made him strong. "Thank you, Bernardo. You're a friend."

Exactly what happened then I do not know. Thelma and Senora Marroquin arrived at the bookshop a little before eight-thirty. It was an almost unknown shop in an obscure street at the northern end of the city, and they waited nearly an hour.

Mr. Brightman, they told themselves, had been delayed. Perhaps he had fallen into the hands of some taxi driver who insisted upon delivering other passengers first. They did not know that he had borrowed my car.

When it became obvious that something more serious was wrong, they came to The Papagayo.

"But he left here more than an hour ago," I said. "He has my car."

"He must have had an accident!" Thelma cried, wringing her hands.

I telephoned the police. No accident had been reported.

I was about to say that he must be lost—after all, he had never driven in San Marlo City before, and our winding streets can be difficult—when I saw the expression on Senora Marroquin's face. She sat rigid on the edge of her chair, quivering, as though she had been struck by lightning.

"Thelma!" she gasped. "Take me home."

"But, Senora—"

"Take me home at once. At once, I say!"

Thelma looked back at me, shaking her head in bewilderment, as the old lady dragged her to the door. "You—you will look for him, Bernardo?" she begged.

I promised.

I enlisted the aid of a taxi driver and we looked for the missing man for some time, concentrating our search in the maze of little streets near the bookshop. No sign of him.

When I returned to The Papagayo, puzzled and alarmed, I found a police car in the drive. Colonel Rivas and some of his men were just getting out of it.

"Unlock his door, Bernardo," he said. He was trembling, I saw.

"His door? But you searched his room only—"

"Open it!"

I led the way upstairs. There was nothing strange about the room that I could see. His clothes were where he had always kept them. His suitcase lay empty in the cupboard. "Will you please tell me what you are looking for?" I asked.

"Nothing," the Colonel sighed. "The bird has flown."

"Flown!"

The Colonel sank on the bed and ran his hands through his glossy hair, a beaten man. It was a shock to me. Never before had I seen the magnificent Colonel Rivas like this, looking as though his world had collapsed about him.

"Why, why, did this have to happen to me?" he groaned. "What have I done to deserve it?"

His policemen leaned against the wall and studied their fingers. On the face of one, at least, I thought I detected a faint smile. Natural, perhaps. The Colonel, I had been told, was not an easy man to work for. I hurried down to the bar to get the poor man a drink.

"Now will you tell me what has happened?"

He gazed at me sadly from the bed. "Bernardo, my suspicions were correct. Your guest is—was—the Gerald Brightman of the photographs."

"Impossible."

"Not impossible, Bernardo. Any determined man can starve himself to a shadow and alter the colour and quantity of his hair. The eyes were the same, remember. You had here under your roof the real Gerald Brightman."

I blinked at him in disbelief.

"Tonight he borrowed your car, no?" Rivas groaned. "He was to have met Senora Marroquin and Miss West at the bookshop. He did not go to the bookshop, Bernardo. He asked them to meet him there only to get them out of the house. He drove to the house. He stripped half a dozen of the Senora's most valuable paintings from their frames and fled with them. By now he is undoubtedly on his way to the San Nicolas border."

I looked wildly about the room. "But he has left his clothes. Even the books he bought."

"He was no connoisseur of books. It was a blind to throw us off the scent and win the confidence of Senora Marroquin. As for the clothes—" he shrugged—"what thief would not exchange a few old clothes for loot worth a fortune? They won't fit him when he puts on weight again, anyway."

"Can't he be stopped?" I asked weakly.

"The police posts on the border have been alerted. I warned them from the Senora's house. But he'll get through them, never fear. Any man that clever . . ." Colonel Rivas heaved such a sigh that I looked at him more closely and thought I detected—yes, did detect—admiration for the man who had so cunningly fooled us. "It's no great feat to slip across the border," he said. "He'll simply leave the car and walk. That's why he took no luggage."

I thought of Thelma West and was all but overwhelmed with sadness.

Colonel Rivas was right. My car was found the following day on a rough mountain road near the border, at a place midway between two police posts. The road did not cross the border there, but Mr. Brightman could have done so on foot easily, over footpaths used by the peasants. In the glove compartment was an

envelope addressed to me, which the police opened before permitting me to read it.

It contained money and a simple note.

*My sincerest gratitude, Bernardo, for your hospitality and the use of your car. I am not permitted an explanation at this time.*

*Ever yours, Gerald Brightman*

The news blew like a hurricane through the capital, and the great Colonel Rivas became a laughing-stock.

Days passed. Senora Marroquin fumed at the police to do something about her missing treasures, but nothing could be done. Appeals to the government of San Nicolas to arrest the man and return him were shrugged aside. San Nicolas, you understand, has no love for San Marlo. It is a small country, ruled by enlightened men who have made astonishing progress in the last few years, but too often in the past it has been threatened and bullied by its larger neighbour.

In San Nicolas, we were given to understand, Mr. Gerald Brightman was a respected citizen. Arrest a man who had given so generously to charity and was beloved by all? Unthinkable! Besides, it was ridiculous to claim that the admired philanthropist of San Nicolas, a plump and well-fed man, could be the scrawny wretch who had stayed at The Papagayo.

Senora Marroquin wrote scathing letters to the newspapers. Colonel Rivas squirmed. The people thought it a great joke.

When the election was over and the votes counted, we had a schoolteacher for a president—a mild-mannered fellow who promised peace and prosperity and an end to political pressure on our neighbours. If we tried very hard, he said, we might one day become as enlightened as they.

Colonel Rivas resigned.

A taxi stopped at The Papagayo one morning and Thelma West stepped out of it. She had been very brave. She was brave now as she embraced my wife and bade us good-bye. She was leaving, she said. She was even then on her way to the airport. Perhaps one day we would meet again. When she had gone, my Beatriz wept.

"They loved each other, those two," Beatriz sobbed. "They were made to love each other. Why, why did it have to turn out this way?"

"Dry your tears," I said sternly, trying to control my own. "He was nothing but a clever thief, and the entire affair was planned to the last detail. He starved himself to change his appearance. He came here to The Papagayo knowing Thelma was our friend and would introduce him to the Senora. He used

his real name, with his pathetic story of being inconvenienced by it, to throw the police off their guard. How can you retain any affection for such a monster?"

"I don't care. I liked him."

I took her in my arms. "I liked him, too."

The affair was forgotten. The hotel season ended and we looked about for a pleasant place to spend a short holiday. "Why don't we go to San Nicolas?" my wife suggested. "Perhaps—perhaps he will remember us."

We drove to San Nicolas City and I made discreet inquiries. He lived, I was told, in a modest house in the suburbs. He was a fine man. A thief? "Be careful what you say about that man, senor. We love him."

With Beatriz, I drove out to look at his house. It was, as they had said, pleasant but unpretentious, in a modest neighbourhood. Other homes were under construction nearby. We hesitated only a moment, then marched up the path and rang the bell.

At first I did not know him. He was not the Gerald Brightman who had occupied our third-floor room, but the man in Colonel Rivas' photographs, plump, round-faced, a picture of vitality. He knew us at once. My hand winced in his grasp.

He embraced my wife with enthusiasm. "Bernardo! Beatriz! Come in, come in."

We sat in a sunny room and sipped sugared rum, nibbled at nuts from a tray. The mild, brown eyes looked sad as they gazed at us. "I owe you an explanation," he said.

"You do."

"It is simple, really. If Colonel Rivas had become your president—and there was no doubt that he would—my little adopted country would have been reduced to terror and trembling. Rivas had pledged himself to apply the most repressive measures. Something had to be done."

I looked at him in amazement. "You stole the pictures only to discredit Rivas?"

"But, of course." Rising, he went to a cupboard and took out the paintings, placing them against the wall. "I have had them reframed, as you see, ready to hang in Senora Marroquin's new home when it is finished." He smiled. "You saw it next door as you came in, perhaps. It is a gift from the government of San Nicolas for her noble assistance."

"Then she knew!"

"A marvellous woman, the Senora," he murmured. "I shall enjoy having her for a neighbour."

We recovered slowly from our astonishment, and then my wife

scowled at him. "This is all very well," she said sternly, "but you deceived a lovely girl to gain your ends. For that we can never forgive you. Had you no faith that she, too, would understand?"

He did not answer. He had no need to, for a door had opened behind him and there she stood, the girl we thought had returned heartbroken to America. Radiant, glowing, she came towards us and took our hands. "So you have come at last," she said.

"Allow me," said Mr. Brightman happily, "to introduce my wife."

"Thelma!" my Beatriz exclaimed in horror. "You have gained weight."

"Gerald likes me better this way."

"But why—why did you not write and tell us you were married?"

"Darling, at first it was not safe. If a word of the truth had leaked out, Rivas would have pounced on it. And then—then . . ." She looked at her husband and smiled, and it was a smile such as few men in this world ever receive from a woman. But, of course, there are few Gerald Brightmans. "You must forgive us," Thelma murmured. "We had so much to think about."

We talked. For two hours we talked. Strolling about the room, I halted before three magnificent small paintings in an alcove. I frowned at them. I had seen them before.

Mr. Brightman came to my side. "You recognise them?"

"They once belonged to Senora Marroquin. They were the gems of her collection. But how are they here? Colonel Rivas bought them from her several years ago."

He placed a hand on my shoulder. "'Stole' would be a more accurate word, at the price he paid. So while he was rushing about in search of me, I stole them back. The Colonel never mentioned it, of course."

"They are for the senora's house?"

"That was my intention. But she insisted we keep them as a token of affection. They were her wedding present."

★ ★ ★

## *NO DOUBT*

"An' always remember not to forget this: When in doubt, talk very slow; it makes up for not having nothing to say. Otherwise, when in doubt, talk very quick; it gives you time to think. But above all, when in doubt, shut up; then somebody else in doubt will talk and make a fool o' himself."

GERALD KERSH, *Fowlers End*

# SAFETY

*The man must have been crazy*
*doing a thing like that*

## BY ELIZABETH FERRARS

THE strange thing is that when Sidney Sankey taught Roddie Bourne to play with matches it was done without the least intention of harm. If a destructive element in Sankey's nature revealed itself in the ideas he had of playthings suitable for a child of five, he himself was unaware of it. Indeed, the instruction of Roddie in this perilous entertainment was probably as innocent an action as Sankey ever performed, for it occurred during the time of extraordinary happiness for him in his friendship with Roddie and with Roddie's family.

When Sankey first met them, the Bournes, like himself, were newcomers to the small midland town of Bardley. Oliver Bourne, who was thirty-eight, who had been in the infantry throughout the war and who had been teaching boys for ten years before he arrived in Bardley, had come as senior history master to the school where Sidney Sankey had just been given the first and, as it turned out, the only job he was ever to have, teaching a little of practically everything to the younger boys.

The friendship, which began as one between Sankey and Bourne, caused surprise in their colleagues, for the two men had almost nothing in common. Bourne was a quiet but ambitious man, brusque and strong-willed, who took a somewhat arrogant pride in his work and his power over his pupils. Sankey was excitable and voluble but timid, with a fear of the boys he had to teach that was immediately recognised by them and ferociously exploited.

He had become a schoolmaster only because he had been unable to think of anything else that he might do better, and for this he despised himself and the whole teaching profession, and hated the boys.

That both he and Bourne were strangers in Bardley was at first the only thing that drew them together. Later, however, there was Mary Bourne. There was also Roddie.

Without Roddie the situation could never have developed. Mary Bourne was lonely and bored in the unfamiliar town. She

had gone to it reluctantly from a small market-town in Somerset only for the sake of the extra money, which would help with Roddie and perhaps make it possible for her to have a second child. She had taken an instant dislike to Bardley, feeling personally outraged at the sight of the blackened walls of its buildings, the specks of soot that settled each day on the windowsills of her home, its drab little rectangular garden, the squealing trams on which she had to ride whenever she went to the shops.

But she was fond of her husband; she had no thought of solving the problem of her boredom by a love-affair with another man. If, therefore, Sidney Sankey had started his visits to her merely for the sake of seeing her when Oliver Bourne was absent, it is unlikely that she would ever have allowed them, as she did, to become more and more frequent.

But Sankey always came to see Roddie.

That he arrived to see Roddie surprisingly often when Bourne was kept late at the school by a committee-meeting or other business of which a junior master was free, ought to have aroused Mary's suspicions. But she was not particularly vain and not at all perspicacious and, though she was only five years older than Sankey, there was something about him which made her think of him as nearer to Roddie's age than to hers.

In spite of his fear and hatred of adolescent boys, Sankey sincerely delighted in the company of the very young, and had a surprising talent for amusing them. Often Mary left him to play with Roddie in the sitting-room while she cooked the supper in the kitchen. Roddie's shouts of pleasure and Sankey's softer laughter as they played some game that Sankey had just invented, helped to delude Mary that he came to her only for mothering, and to feel the warmth of a home around him instead of the chill of his lodgings. She clung to this delusion even after she had realised that, for the first time since she had married him, her husband was seriously jealous.

His jealousy first flared up on the evening when he found Roddie playing with matches. Coming home just after Sankey had left the house, Oliver Bourne found his son kneeling on the hearthrug near to a blazing fire, with several matchboxes emptied on the rug before him. He was using the matches to build a little village of log-cabins.

For his age Roddie was deft with his hands and he had been well instructed. The log-cabins were neat, square, well-balanced, and well-roofed; he had every reason to be proud of them. But the matches were not even safety matches.

The sight gave Bourne the excuse to lose his temper that he had been wanting far more than he had realised.

He gave a shout. "Mary, come here!"

She was in the kitchen, in the middle of one of those operations at the stove that cannot possibly be interrupted.

She called back, "In a minute."

"Come at once!" Bourne shouted. "Come and see what your child's doing."

His voice—the sheer rage in it—brought a protesting wail from Roddie. Mary came running from the kitchen. Her face, which was a softly pretty one, with rather plump cheeks and big, mild, grey eyes, was flushed from the heat of the cooking-stove, but she grew pale as she took in the scene before her.

Before she could speak, Bourne said furiously, "Didn't you *know* he was doing this?"

Without answering him, Mary dropped on her knees beside Roddie and scooped the matches up into her apron. It was a stupid thing to do, for it made Roddie, who did not in the least understand what he had been doing wrong, start screaming with disappointment and hurt pride. But the sight of the child with all those matches so near to the fire had momentarily filled Mary with panic. Besides, she was not accustomed to Oliver in that kind of rage.

He was standing rigidly at the edge of the hearthrug, ignoring Roddie, fixing his bright, angry stare on Mary's face. He was a short man, with powerful shoulders, a short, thick neck, and a big head, a heavy forehead, and a square, heavy chin.

"How long has he been at it?" he demanded. "How long is it since you troubled to find out what he was doing? And where's the fireguard?"

The fireguard was where he could see it, in a corner of the room. Supposing that he knew this, Mary answered a question that he had not asked. "Sidney must have forgotten to put it back," she said. "He was here with Roddie until a minute or two ago. He's only just gone."

"Sidney's good at forgetting a lot of things, but never the time when I'm expected home," Bourne said in a voice that shook with the violence of his feelings. "And while he's here you forget about Roddie."

Aghast, returning her husband's stare with blank bewilderment, Mary's face flushed as swiftly as a moment before it had lost its colour. In all the years of her marriage, it had never occurred to her that Oliver could ever say such a thing to her.

Seeing this, his face also reddened and, with a shrug that was halfway to an apology, he went to fetch the fireguard and place it in front of the fire. But then, because the guard was seldom left there unless Roddie was alone in the room, Bourne removed it

again and put it back in the corner, muttering confusedly as he did so, "The man must be crazy, doing a thing like that. Anyway, where did all those matches come from?"

"He must have brought them himself," Mary said. She was still kneeling on the hearthrug, with the matches heaped in her apron, while Roddie stamped and cried before her. "He didn't mean any harm by it."

Bourne by now was beginning to feel hot with embarrassment at the emotion which he had allowed himself to show, and because of this he appeared to accept what Mary had said with a readiness that was far from sincere. The harmlessness of Sidney Sankey was something in which Oliver Bourne never quite believed again. But he was too angry with himself for his self-betrayal to say so.

"Well, that's a change at least," he said, and managed a short laugh. "He usually pockets things. It's become the hardest thing in the world to keep cigarettes in the house since he's taken to coming here. And matches were becoming practically extinct."

"He's always bringing things for Roddie," Mary said as she stood up and went to the door.

"Mary—" Bourne began.

She paused in the doorway.

"Mary, what I said just now—"

"I've forgotten it," she said distantly as she went back to the kitchen, where a good piece of steak had had time to spoil and the potatoes had boiled to a pulp.

Instead of attending to this now, Mary stood still in the middle of the kitchen, looking down at the matches in her apron. She had not forgotten Oliver's words. In fact, she was only just beginning to feel the full shock of the anger that they had caused in her. She was also feeling for the first time, in a way that startled her, that Sidney Sankey was intensely important to her.

It was not, she assured herself quickly, that she was in love with him. Wasn't she years older than he was? Wasn't she happily married? And weren't they all nice people, she, Sidney, and Oliver?

As she stood there alone in the kitchen, aware from their voices in the sitting-room that Oliver, in his brusque way, was now comforting Roddie, promising him that if it mattered to him so much, he should have matches to play with, but matches that wouldn't be dangerous, there sprang to life in Mary a sense of Sidney as someone whom she could not bear to do without. For a long, bleak moment it seemed to her that if she took heed

of Oliver's jealousy, if she stopped Sidney's visits, there would be nothing left for her in this grim town—where she had no other friends—but its blackness, and the specks of soot that eternally settled on the windowsills, and the hideous trams that went squealing past.

That she felt this so strongly frightened her. As soon as she had recognised the feeling, she decided frantically that Sidney's visits must stop.

It was one of the causes of the disaster that was to follow that Mary's mind all too often worked in this way. Just as her panic on seeing Roddie playing with a heap of matches had made her snatch them away from him without giving herself time to think of what this might do to Roddie, so her panic on realising how important Sankey's visits had become to her made her blindly determine to deny herself those visits, without first trying to find out what they meant either to Sankey or to her husband.

When a few days later she nerved herself to the point of telling Sankey that he must not come to the house at all unless Oliver invited him, she was so bemused by the sense of her own loss that although she noticed the flash of something strange in Sankey's eyes, she did not recognise it as a warning.

She and Sankey were sitting facing each other in the chairs on each side of the fireplace. Roddie, engaged on an ambitious building project with the safety matches that his father had given him, was on the hearthrug between them.

She had begun by telling Sidney of Oliver's anger on finding Roddie playing with matches, then she had spoken less directly of Oliver's jealousy. Cowardice had made her play her little scene when Roddie was there, for his presence gave her an excuse to speak evasively and the right to expect Sidney to do the same. Laughing at Oliver for being so ridiculous as to be jealous, she asked Sidney if he did not agree with her that however ridiculous one's husband might sometimes be, one ought not, if one cared for him, to let him feel unhappy.

It was then that she saw that strange blaze in Sidney's eyes. But it was followed at once by a look so vague and blank that Mary started to wonder if he was really listening to her.

He was often abstracted, given to long silences which sometimes even Roddie found odd, while at other times he was so talkative that no one else could get a word in.

The changes on his thin face, with the slightly prominent, dark eyes, the long, sharp nose, and the small, lop-sided mouth, matched these changes in his mood. In animation, his expression had a gay, vivid, curiously innocent quality which gave

him a kind of good looks, but in one of his withdrawn moods the look that settled on his face was dull, sullen, and unattractive.

It was with such a look now and only a slight, unusual mottling of his face, that he continued to gaze at Mary as she went on.

"I think perhaps it's just because he's generally worried and worn out," she said. "I mean, it isn't really like Oliver to act as he did. I mean, I know he's found this new job a strain, and he's tired and he keeps having headaches. And so I'm really anxious that he shouldn't have the chance to upset himself over anything so silly. You understand?"

She hardly knew that she was being dishonest. But Sankey knew it. He was exceedingly sensitive to the feelings of others, even if his interpretation of what he perceived was often distorted. He knew now that Mary was concerned not for her husband's peace of mind, but for her own. She was thinking only of herself, not of Oliver; and of course not of Sidney Sankey.

As he still did not answer, Mary said nervously, "Sidney, you do agree with me, don't you? You do understand?"

"Oh yes, I understand," he answered absently, staring through Mary at some dim images that had begun to form at the shadowy edges of his mind. "I'm usually fairly understanding."

"Oh, you are," Mary said. "That's why I knew that I could talk to you about it all."

"But I'll miss you—and Roddie. At first."

Sankey looked down at Roddie and frowned slightly. They looked so alike, Roddie and his mother, with their round, softly-moulded faces, grey eyes, and soft, fair hair, that it had felt natural to love them both with the same love, as if they were still part of one another.

Playing with Roddie, feeling happy at the warmth of the child's response to him, Sankey had felt as if this response were Mary's too, as if it were merely by some accident that the arm that had slid round his neck was Roddie's and not hers, that the eager breath on his cheek was the little boy's and not the woman's.

A mistake, of course. A very foolish mistake.

Stooping down, Sankey put out a finger and gave a sharp jab at Roddie's latest and largest log-cabin. The matches toppled over in a heap.

Mary gave a little cry. "Oh, why did you do that?"

"Why do we do any of the things we do?" Sankey asked as he stood upright again and went to the door.

Mary did not follow him to see him out, for as she looked at the heap of matches on the hearthrug, and at Roddie's bewildered face above them, suddenly, for the first time, she was frightened of something that was in Sidney Sankey and not in herself.

She tried to shake off this fear, yet it stayed with her throughout the evening. Oliver Bourne, coming in presently, saw that something was wrong. But he realised also that a packet of cigarettes that he had left on the mantelpiece had disappeared. This meant that Sankey had been there and, because of the rage that always overcame him now whenever he thought of Sankey, Bourne did not trust himself to ask Mary what had happened.

Sankey that evening walked all the way back to his lodgings instead of taking the tram. A thin mist of rain was falling. In the light of the street-lamps the pavements had a slimy sheen. The air felt like a sodden blanket wrapped round him, clinging to his thin body with a chill that started him shivering fiercely. He turned up the collar of his coat, sank his head between his shoulders, buried his hands in his pockets, but did not think of walking faster.

With his gaze sliding unseeingly over the muddily gleaming paving-stones and oily puddles, he strolled along, chewing his lip and sometimes suddenly whistling a half bar of music.

But when he arrived at his lodgings he was jolted out of his abstraction by the discovery that he had no matches in his pocket with which to light the gas-fire in his room. He had only a packet of cigarettes which he did not remember having bought. A few days ago he had bought half a dozen boxes of matches, but he had left them all in the Bournes' house. Now he would have to go downstairs and ask his landlady to help him out.

At the thought he flung himself down on the bed in the cold room, clutching his head and pouring out frantic childish curses of a kind that he thought he had forgotten until this moment of despair.

During the next few weeks, Sankey was very much on Bourne's mind. Though he had never discussed the matter with Mary, he knew that the scene that he had made had driven her to tell Sankey to stay away from the house. That she had done this had been a great relief to Bourne, yet whenever he passed Sankey in the corridors of the school building, or saw him in the staff common-room, saw the unhealthy blotching of his sullen face and the way that his dark eyes evaded his own, an uneasy conviction developed in Bourne's mind that he and Mary were not at the end of their troubles with Sidney Sankey.

Among the other masters it was being said generally that Sankey would never last the year out. He was too inefficient, too helpless with the boys, too lazy. But the year, what was left of it, often seemed to Bourne a long time, too long to be endured without taking action of some sort. Only he did not know what

action. And really there seemed to be nothing that he could do about Sankey but, like the other masters, leave him alone.

This would have been far the best and safest course for the Bournes to pursue, both for themselves and for Sankey. He was almost intolerably unhappy at the school, was suffering badly from sleeplessness, and eating so little that even his indifferent landlady had begun to worry about him, but the image of Mary was fading from his mind.

He had almost managed to blot from memory the sweetness of the evenings that he had spent playing with Roddie while Mary went ahead with her cooking, calling out to them occasionally from the kitchen, her voice intimate and gay.

If he gave a thought to the few occasions when he had been quite alone with her, it was no longer to think of her as tender and desirable, but as really rather insipid. At the same time, when now and then he tried his hardest to make his first clear anger against her—that confident, humiliated hatred—blaze up as fiercely as it had done, the flames required a tiresome amount of stoking. So if Mary had not happened to meet him in the town one Saturday afternoon and invited him to go home with her for tea, there need have been no tragedy.

Mary gave him the invitation because her own feelings about him had completely changed. She was far happier than she had been during those first weeks in Bardley, because now she had plenty of friends. There was the wife of one of the other schoolmasters, who had a little boy of Roddie's age and whom Mary saw nearly every day. There were her next-door neighbours, a middle-aged couple who had begun a friendship cautiously by commenting on the weather over the garden wall, but with whom Mary and Oliver now spent frequent evenings, eating large quantities of homemade cake and being instructed in local politics. There were the members of a choral society to which Mary had been introduced. In this altered situation, Mary knew that she had no reason to fear the strength of her own feelings for Sidney Sankey, and on catching sight of him as usual alone, looking idly into a shop window, she thought only that she had been extraordinarily unkind to him, and that it would be pleasant—a load off her conscience—to make it up to him now by asking him to tea.

She did not notice that he started to tremble when she spoke to him, and the hoarseness of his voice when he answered her only made her think that he had a cold and hope that he would not give it to Roddie.

His answer was a confused excuse for not having tea with her, yet he started to walk along beside her and Mary had no doubt

that he was pleased and grateful. His failure to give any answer at all to what she said next, and the way that he avoided looking at her did not seem to her particularly strange. Hadn't he always gone in for these trance-like silences?

She talked for both of them, apologising cheerfully because it was so long since they had seen one another and because Roddie was showing so little interest in his old friend.

"It isn't that he's forgotten you, it's just that he's shy," she said. "He's always talked about you a lot, and he keeps making us play those games you taught him."

Roddie looked up at his mother with a little frown. Of course he had not forgotten Sidney, but he was not shy and could not understand why she should say he was, when usually she complained that he was too eager to thrust himself forward. If he wasn't bothering much to talk to Sidney now it was simply because, as she knew, he had a friend of his own age, and so could get on very well without the help of the kind of grown-up who stayed away for weeks at a time without any explanation.

Sankey, glancing down, sensitive as always to the moods of others, saw all this in the child's face, and his mouth, normally a little crooked, dragged farther still to one side.

When they reached the Bournes' house he followed Mary in without even trying to repeat his refusal to have tea with her.

He hardly knew what was happening to him. He seemed to be split in two, one part of him feeling a deadly fury against both mother and child, the other part aware of all the old, comforting sweetness of their presence.

Mary, going to the kitchen, made tea and hot buttered toast and opened a packet of sweet biscuits; bringing the tray into the living-room, she found Sankey looking thoughtfully at a drawing-board balanced on a stool, on which Roddie had recently constructed an elaborate, cathedral-like structure out of safety matches. A little patronisingly, Roddie was explaining to Sankey how he had supported the walls and the spire with fuse-wire and pins. Sankey, nodding, had a curiously dazed look, as if he could not follow what the child was saying.

The one part of him had suddenly thought that all that he had to do now was absently to put a cigarette in his mouth, light it, and drop the still-burning match on to Roddie's cathedral. Almost as if he had already done it, Sankey could see the whole building burst into one great flame.

Then he had only to knock over the drawing-board so that Roddie's clothes caught fire. That was all. For Roddie would scream, Mary would try to beat out the flames, her own clothes would catch fire, and her hair, her soft, fair hair . . .

"He did it all by himself, you know," Mary said. She had put down the tray and come to Sankey's side. "Neither of us helped him at all. The fuse-wire was all his own idea. We feel rather proud of him."

She was standing so close to Sankey that her sleeve was brushing his. Her fair hair, with the lamplight shining on it, curled on her forehead and against her smooth, plump cheeks. To touch it would be like silk. It had a faint scent that seemed to be intimately and uniquely Mary's.

Sankey gave a deep sigh, pocketed the packet of cigarettes and the box of matches that he had just absent-mindedly taken from the mantelpiece, reached out clumsily, and drew Mary to him. He was aware that her body stiffened against his and that she made an attempt to draw away from him. Then she stood quite still, but he was not aware how fiercely his arms were crushing her. He had started trembling violently and had tears in his eyes. Nothing in the world seemed to matter except that he should bury his face in her hair.

Oliver Bourne, coming in at that moment from the study where he had been correcting homework, felt his reason consumed in hatred. Somehow he had the presence of mind to grab Roddie, thrust him out of the room, and close the door. Then he picked up the heavy, brass poker from the fireplace and brought it down on to Sidney Sankey's skull.

As Mary shrieked, Bourne struck again. It was only when Sankey's limp body slumped to the ground that the madness died out of Bourne's face, leaving it as dull and empty as Sankey's.

She stumbled away from them both to the door, and Bourne let the poker slip from his fingers on to the carpet. "Wait!" he croaked.

Mary turned, leaning back against the door, clutching at the handle to stop herself falling. When she had seen her husband with the poker held high over Sankey's head, she had thought that he meant to kill her, too.

Bourne muttered something, then again he said hoarsely, "Wait!" Pressing his hands to his temples, he stood quite still, looking blankly at Sankey's body, as if he knew neither what it was nor how it had come there.

Mary could not bear to look at Sankey. She kept her eyes on her husband's grey, vacant face and so saw expression return to it. For a moment this seemed as terrifying as the sight of Sankey's battered head.

The expression that appeared, businesslike, determined, competent, was one so familiar to her, so normal, that it left

her straying wits no possibility of escape from the knowledge that this man whom she knew so well was a murderer, and had always had it in his nature to commit this murder.

Bourne stooped and searched quickly through Sankey's pockets. All that he appeared to be searching for were his own cigarettes, for as soon as he found them he straightened up, thrusting them into his own pocket.

"Mary, can you handle Roddie?" he asked sharply.

"Handle him?" she said helplessly.

"Persuade him that he didn't see Sankey today?"

"I don't know how."

"Then persuade him that he must never tell anyone about it. That it's a secret."

That seemed to her less impossible, since all children love secrets.

"I can try," she said.

"Then go on—do it."

"What are you going to do—with—?"

"I'll tell you when I've done it. For now, just remember, you never saw Sankey today. You or Roddie. You haven't seen him for weeks."

"For weeks," Mary echoed stupidly, then she turned swiftly, jerked at the door-handle, and escaped from the room.

As soon as she was out she started to cry hopelessly and noisily. The sound brought Roddie running to her. She cried fairly often, yet whenever she did so he had the feeling it was something unbearable that had never happened before, and he would do anything in the whole world to stop it.

This time, all he had to do, it seemed, was to promise never to tell anybody that Sidney Sankey had been in the house that day. It was easy. He wasn't interested in Sidney any more and didn't see why anyone else should be. But when he had given the promise, his mother's tears did not stop.

Mary had a terrified conviction that she had forgotten something that was vital to Oliver's safety, and what was almost worse, had a wild horror of even trying to remember it.

The news of Sidney Sankey's death was in the newspapers the next day. His body had been found, late in the evening, on a railway line a short distance from the town. In the brief paragraph, no mention was made of foul play being suspected, and Sidney's landlady was quoted as having said that she really wasn't at all surprised because, poor boy, he'd been in a terrible state of depression for a long time.

Next day Sidney's colleagues said the same, both among

themselves and to a detective inspector, who appeared at the school in the afternoon to ask a few routine questions.

All the masters to whom he spoke, and that included Oliver Bourne, said they had noticed Sankey's recent air of dejection. Some of them said they had wished that they had known how to help him, others remembered prophesying that he would never last the year out. The detective inspector went away looking not particularly interested or suspicious.

But that was because he had trained himself not to show interest or suspicion, except when it might be useful to do so. In fact, something that happened while he had been talking to the senior history master struck him as deserving more than a little thought.

During the interview Oliver Bourne had smoked several cigarettes. As he had stuck each one between his lips, he had taken a matchbox from his pocket, extracted a match, and struck it on the box. But each time the match had failed to light. Cursing absently, he had thrown the match into the waste-paper basket and accepted a light from the inspector.

The last time this had occurred, just as the inspector was leaving, Bourne had not troubled to return the matchbox to his pocket, but left it lying on his desk. The inspector had unobtrusively pocketed it himself. On the way back to the police station he verified what he thought he had observed about the matches while talking to Bourne.

They were safety matches, yet the box was the kind intended for matches that strike on anything, from the sole of a boot to a thumbnail. And that, the inspector thought, was an odd thing to carry in your pocket, since it was entirely useless.

The uselessness of it, the complete futility of carefully filling an ordinary matchbox with safety matches, made it a far odder thing to carry than the safety matchbox filled with ordinary matches which the man found dead on the railway line had had in his pocket.

The inspector, as a matter of fact, had not thought that there was anything particularly unusual about those matches in that matchbox. He had supposed that Sidney Sankey had run out of the safety matches he had been carrying, and had been helped out by someone who happened to have only the other kind.

Even now the inspector did not attach overmuch importance to the complementary character of the matchboxes in the two men's pockets. However, several people had told him the Bournes were the only people in Bardley with whom Sankey had even tried to make friends, so in spite of Bourne's statement that he had scarcely spoken to Sankey for a couple of months, the inspector decided to visit the Bournes' home.

He was not looking for a murderer, but only for a motive for suicide. Yet as soon as he had entered the Bournes' living-room he started to ask himself certain questions. Why, for instance, did a patch of the carpet look as if it had been cleaned recently? Why was the brass poker on the hearth so bright that it could only have been cleaned that morning, while the other fire-irons and the brass fender had the faint tarnish which in the Bardley atmosphere clouded metal surfaces after a day or two? Why were Mary Bourne's eyelids swollen with weeping and her eyes blank with fear?

Oliver Bourne had not yet come home from school.

When the inspector, accompanied by a self-effacing sergeant, rang the doorbell, Mary had been sitting by the fire, mending one of Roddie's jerseys, while Roddie had been playing in a corner, adding a wing to his cathedral.

He took no notice of the inspector's arrival or of the things that he and Mary had said to one another about Sidney Sankey, for when Roddie set to work, designing, building, creating, he was wholly absorbed. Even when his mother and the stranger started talking about him he did not pay much attention because, of course, they just talked about how dangerous it was for a little boy like him to be playing with matches, and that was pretty boring.

"Yes, we were worried to death when he started it," Mary said, "and tried to get him interested in bricks and construction kits and everything else we could think of. I suppose that was our mistake. The more we tried to keep matches away from him, the more set he was on matches and nothing but matches. And they're difficult to keep away from a boy who's as active as he is. He'd find them wherever we hid them. So we gave in and made him promise he'd play only with the ones we gave him and well away from the fire."

"And he keeps his promise?" the inspector asked.

"Oh yes," Mary said. "A promise—" But that reminded her of the promise Roddie had given her the day before and of what would happen if he broke it, and her voice dried up. She had to clear her throat before she could continue. "A promise is a very serious thing to a little boy."

"And you give him safety matches," the inspector said, "in the non-safety sort of box, so that he can't strike them."

Mary was surprised at how quickly he had guessed Oliver's device for protecting Roddie from the dangerous consequences of his passion.

"Yes, my husband uses up the non-safety matches, keeping them in the safety matchboxes we've emptied," she said, "and

we leave them up there on the mantelpiece. Roddie never touches them because of his—his promise." On that word her voice again dried up. She raised a hand that felt icy cold to her mouth.

She knew now what she had forgotten the evening before when she had seen Oliver searching through Sankey's pockets to recover the packet of cigarettes which he had guessed would inevitably have found its way there, and which would certainly have Oliver's fingerprints upon it.

She had forgotten the box of matches which she had actually seen Sankey pocket, at the same time as the cigarettes, as she came into the room with the tea-tray. She had forgotten because she had not wanted to remember. With the unconscious craft of her new fear of her husband, she had kept her secret to herself until she knew the police also knew it.

That they did know it was clear, for there were the two match-boxes, or two just like them, side by side in the inspector's hand.

Oliver Bourne, coming in at that moment, saw them also, understood what they meant and thought, as he had thought the day before, that he had again caught Mary in an act of betrayal.

His rage was as sudden and violent as it had been the day before, yet it was still against Sidney Sankey and all that he had done to the Bournes, beginning with his crazy instruction of a child of five in the pleasure of playing with matches.

It was at the image of Sidney Sankey that Oliver hurled his lighted cigarette, though it fell on Roddie's cathedral.

As it exploded into a sheet of flame, Mary screamed and snatched at Roddie. She swung him away, but one of his shoes caught a corner of the drawing-board on which the cathedral stood, and overturned it at Oliver's feet.

The self-effacing sergeant who had arrived with the inspector wrenched at the hearthrug and hurled himself at the burning mass in an attempt to smother the flames, but Oliver only fought him off, trying to escape from him and from the fire.

In a sense he did escape from the police, for he did not live to stand trial, but died that night in the hospital of burns and shock, and his hatred of Sidney Sankey.

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## *MODERN ENGLISH USAGE?*

Good? A word so freely used to mean such different things. If a man shoots his mother-in-law he is not necessarily a good man. But nobody can deny that he is a good shot.

G. K. CHESTERTON

# RAIN IN DINAS

*He dreamt of coconut palms*
*and blue lagoons*

## BY E. L. MALPASS

THEY were used to rain in Dinas, with that old Snowdon ripping the clouds wide open as they sailed past. But never rain like this!

It began on St. Swithin's, and it went on and on and on. Sometimes it was a real Welsh downpour, all umbrellas and sodden shoes and misery. Sometimes it was only a few drops, with a quenched sun afloat in clouds that were like cold, grey gravy. But it never quite stopped. And the sun never quite shone. Do you wonder that people's spirits were soon as waterlogged as their once-green fields?

It affected tempers, too. Even nice citizens became morose and irritable. And as for those, like Mrs. Megan Thomas, in whom the milk of human kindness had already been on the turn, they became positively curdled.

But happy as a sandboy, Eli Shenkin was. Sawing and hammering away in his back garden, with the rain pouring off his sou'wester and his plastic raincoat, he looked forward to weeks of uninterrupted fishing by day, and a quiet pipe and a book in the evenings. For he was by nature a solitary, though friendly man, and preferred his own company to that of his fellows.

He had only one anxiety, in fact, and that was lest his project should come to the ears of his sister, Megan Thomas, or of the Borough Council, either of whom would very quickly put an end to his dreams.

The Reverend Edwards found a queue in front of him when he went to the Town Hall to pay his rates. Last in the queue was Mrs. Megan Thomas, with her son, Cadwallader, swinging and swaying chimpanzee-like from her hand. "Terrible weather, Mrs. Thomas," he cried, in a voice practised in keeping them awake at the back of Bethel Chapel's gallery. "Just been to visit your brother. Ceasing to pin his faith on that old rainbow in Genesis, Eli is. Building himself an ark in his garden, big as a house."

"Well, what a place to build an ark," said Megan, bridling as usual. "Not doing it in the front, I hope, and upsetting the neighbours?"

"No. In the back, very secluded," said Mr. Edwards. But the damage had been done.

That same day, Eli heard, above his banging and hammering, the front door bell. His heart sank. Megan? The Council? He stood irresolute. Then, his square, black beard out-thrust before him, his eyes anxious behind their steel-rimmed glasses, he hurried through the red-and-blue-tiled hall to answer the door.

His worst fears were realised. Rhys the Planning stood dripping on the mat.

"What is this erection you are building in your garden, Eli Shenkin?" Rhys demanded sternly. He stepped into the echoing hall, where the smells of gas from the bathroom and cabbage from the kitchen hung about like tired ghosts.

"Just a little ark, Mr. Rhys," said Eli miserably, leading the way through to the garden.

"Have you obtained planning permission?" asked Rhys, as if he didn't know.

"No," said Eli even more miserably.

"Then down it must come," said Mr. Rhys.

They were in the garden now, with the great, black ark towering above them. Just like the one in the pictures, it was. Eli looked at it with a mixture of pride and longing. Then he said diffidently, "I don't remember reading anything about arks in the Council bye-laws, Mr. Rhys."

"Any erection requires planning permission," snapped Rhys. "And I may say that in this case it would not have been given, even if you had applied." He was getting wetter and crosser. His spectacles flashed in the grey light. "Dismantled it must be."

"Very well, Mr. Rhys," Eli said humbly. Mr. Rhys looked relieved. "And when our Member stands up in the Palace of Westminster and asks, 'Why was not Eli Shenkin allowed to build an ark in his own backyard?' I hope the Home Secretary will have a copy of the bye-law relating to arks."

Mr. Rhys ceased to look relieved. But he said boldly, "Never would you persuade our Member to ask such a question."

"Maybe not," Eli said. "Even though he is my cousin by marriage," he added thoughtfully.

Rhys the Planning swallowed. Nevertheless, "It must be removed," he insisted.

There was a quick spatter of rain. Eli Shenkin's voice was suddenly kind. "Listen, Mr. Rhys," he said. "It will be

removed when the waters begin to rise over the earth. When they creep up to your chin, your mouth, your nostrils, then the ark will rise, too. It will float away, out of this garden, out of Dinas, out into the desolate waste of waters that will already have closed over your unhappy bowler."

Mr. Rhys shuddered. He put up his umbrella.

"Unless," added Shenkin kindly, "you would care to buy a ticket for the cruise."

He showed a thoughtful Mr. Rhys to the door. But despite his brave words he was worried. He would get no peace now. They would make him destroy his beloved ark, timber by timber. Gone were his hopes of a long, quiet fishing holiday, even of surviving the flood that he knew was coming. Unless—and this was his only hope—unless the ark could be floated away before the actual demolition order arrived.

But when he reached the door, he knew even that hope was vain. Mrs. Thomas and her Cadwallader stood on the step.

"What is all this about an ark, Eli?" she demanded. She swept through the hall, drawing her finger by force of habit through the dust on the hallstand. But even she looked awed when she reached the garden. She groped in her bag and produced a handkerchief. She dabbed her eyes. "Never! Never would I have believed it," she sobbed.

"Believed what, Megan dear?" asked Eli, knowing all too well.

Despite her tears she managed a quelling look. "Why, you! Preparing to save your own skin in secret, while I, your sister, your widowed sister, perished." She put a hand on Cadwallader's cowlick. "To say nothing of your poor, fatherless nephew."

"A—a surprise it was going to be," stammered Eli.

Megan Thomas snorted. "And I have a surprise for you, too. Not gallivanting off on your own in that thing, Eli Shenkin. What would the neighbours say? You need a woman to look after you."

Eli sighed. You couldn't fight Megan *and* a Borough Council. He stood, defeated, while the rain cascaded from his sou'wester and into his boots. He looked at Megan. He scowled at Cadwallader, who scowled back. No. You could pay too high a price for mere survival, he decided. Tomorrow he would begin demolishing the ark.

But when morning came he could not bring himself to destroy his creation. He would defy the Council. He would even defy Megan. He would play for time.

The rain went on. Depressions chased each other across the

country like great black clouds. Barometers broke in their struggles to get lower than nature had intended. The bit of seaweed on the Air Ministry roof went mildewed, and had to be replaced. No one had seen Snowdon for weeks.

And then, slowly, ominously, the rivers began to rise. Puddles, pools, lakes formed in the fields. Eli Shenkin's ark, tethered to a lilac tree, began to rock at her moorings.

Meanwhile, Eli was victualling the ark as fast as he could go; helped by Megan, who ruthlessly flung overboard tins of tobacco to make room for Cadwallader's favourite breakfast cereal. Sacks of flour, tins of cocoa and baked beans, ship's biscuits went aboard; soon the ark looked and smelt like Price's Grocery Emporium.

But when it came to animals Eli decided to break with tradition. He saw no point in turning *his* ark into a floating zoo, he said.

The demolition order from the Borough Council he ignored. Until, a week later Rhys the Planning arrived, a paper in his hand. And he was not alone. Beside him walked Roberts the Roads and Williams the Sanitation.

"What you got there, Evan Rhys?" Eli asked warily. "Another demolition order?"

"No, indeed," said Rhys. "A requisition order. Desperate, things are becoming. The Borough Council have decided to use your ark as a temporary Town Hall. The mayoral party will come aboard at nine-thirty tomorrow morning. See that everything is prepared."

Stunned, Eli Shenkin was. "And if I refuse?" he asked.

"You will be sent to prison. And the ark will still be requisitioned." He added chattily, "Three feet high they say the water is in the cells already."

Eli Shenkin bowed his head. Mr. Rhys gave him a searching look. Then, quietly, he and his henchmen went away.

As soon as they had gone, Eli put his shoulders to the ark. He heaved and strained, splashing about in water up to his thighs. He almost wept with frustration. The ark would not budge.

At the slow rate the water in his garden was rising, it would be another week before he could sail. And then it would be too late. He would have to watch from a first-storey window while the Mayor and Aldermen sailed away to safety.

But that night the wind rose, and whipped the tattered clouds across the sky and drove the rising waters into a frenzy. Oh, a terrible night it was, with rain and lightning and thunder tumbling out of the sky in all directions. One of those nights when a man feels as helpless as a spider being washed down a drain.

Eli, a sound sleeper, imagined that firemen were playing a hose on his bedroom window. He woke in a panic, grabbed his

sou'wester from the bedpost and clapped it about his ears, leapt into his gumboots, pulled his raincoat round him, tore downstairs, and flung open the backdoor.

A wall of water fell on him, knocked him down, swished him into the kitchen, and swished him out again—out into the garden where his ark had once been. Fortunately, just as he came to the surface his dustbin floated by. He grabbed a handle, and was immediately swept away by the raging waters.

His mental distress soon made him forget his physical discomforts. If only he had not slept so soundly! He could have been aboard the ark, and alone, when she dragged her moorings. She had slipped through the fingers of Megan Thomas and the Borough Council. Unfortunately, she had also slipped through his.

And then, even while these bitter thoughts tormented him, he became aware that his dustbin was clattering against some solid object. He looked up. There, looming over him in the blackness, was the ark.

A rope trailed at the stern. He went up it, hand over hand. Then, quite unable to believe his good fortune, he found himself standing on his own sound deck. Oh, but that was a wonderful moment for Eli Shenkin! He took a deep breath of the gusty air. When dawn came he would be a long, long way from his sister Megan and the Borough Council. He would just go below, change into some dry clothes, and then come on deck and steer his ship as far from Dinas as possible.

He went below, and his heart seemed to stop beating. A light was shining from under his cabin door.

For a moment he gazed at it in unbelief. Then he pushed the door open. A candle burnt on the table. Its soft light fell upon, but could not soften, the hard features of Megan Thomas. And in Eli's own bunk, Cadwallader clasped a teddy bear in innocent slumber.

"What—what are you two doing here?" gasped Eli.

"Taking no chances," Megan said nastily. "Came aboard as soon as the storm began." She sniffed. "Thought you might have been pleased to see your poor sister safe on this night of tempest."

"And very pleased to see Cadwallader, too, I'm sure," Eli said, sarcastic. "Only sorry you didn't bring the rest of his school as well."

"Better find yourself somewhere to sleep, rather than waste your time in futile recriminations," Mrs. Thomas said. "Very tired I am, and not looking forward to sharing a narrow bunk with Cadwallader, him being a vigorous sleeper."

Eli sighed. His world was in ruins. There was only one comfort at a time like this: a cup of tea. He pushed open the door of the galley. But he got no farther.

Leaning comfortably on the stove, drinking cocoa with an abstracted air, was Rhys the Planning. Eli Shenkin withdrew quietly. Rhys did not even see him.

Eli went on deck to await, with a heavy heart, the unwelcome dawn.

The days passed. Slowly the ill-assorted quartet settled down to arkboard life. But Megan Thomas and Rhys the Planning remained as cheerless as the drenching skies. They seemed to blame Eli for everything: the flood itself; the endless, wearying expanse of grey water; the driving clouds. They refused to help in any way with the running of the ark. They just spent their time muttering mutinously in corners.

But it was not until Cadwallader fell overboard for the fifth time that Eli showed signs of impatience. "Cadwallader's overboard again," he said to Megan, pointing to a distant arm rising from the waves.

Megan screamed. "Do something, Eli. Don't just stand there," she cried.

Eli went on filling his pipe. "Your turn, Mr. Rhys," he said cheerfully, indicating the rubber dinghy with his toe.

Daggers, Mr. Rhys looked. But it was clear that Eli wasn't going to budge, and Megan Thomas was growing hysterical. Rhys the Planning went overboard, and restored a half-drowned Cadwallader to his mother with an ill grace.

Unfortunately, he strongly resented this action on Eli's part. And he was a dangerous enemy. Eli would have been wiser to rescue Cadwallader for the fifth time.

The rain went on. Eli, with three people and an ark to look after, toiled incessantly. Sometimes, with a bitter laugh, he would think of the voyage he had imagined, fishing, smoking, meditating. At these times he would consider plans for ridding his ship of his unwelcome passengers. But he was a gentle person. Violence was out of the question and, though the ark was well-stocked, it had never occurred to him to bring any poison.

Early in September, something happened that drove such thoughts from his mind. It stopped raining. And the sun came out.

"Pity we can't send a raven out to look for land," grumbled Megan. "Always said you should have brought animals, Eli."

Eli nodded. "Maybe you are right. Cadwallader would

have come in useful for once, anyway. For feeding the lions," he added darkly.

"I do not care for that remark about an innocent child, Mr. Shenkin," Rhys said hotly. "Ambiguous, it sounded."

"It was not meant to be," Eli said gently.

He went up on deck, where the sunlight fell like a blessing on his tired limbs. He gazed out across the dancing, sparkling waters. Then he stiffened. He peered. He took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. But it was still there, a green island floating on the far horizon.

He went to the companion-way. "Mr. Rhys, Megan, come up here a minute," he called. They came up, scowling. Eli pointed out the land.

"Where you reckon we are, Mr. Rhys?" he inquired.

Rhys, who had kept a careful note of winds and tides, said importantly, "According to my calculations, somewhere over the South Seas."

Even Cadwallader gave a gasp of pleasurable excitement. "I don't see any palm trees," said Megan.

"Or any grass skirts, either," said Eli, and was promptly quelled by a glance from Megan Thomas.

All day the ark drifted towards the land. And it was clear that the waters were subsiding rapidly, for the island became hourly larger and higher and steeper, until Eli said, "You know, Mr. Rhys, if we were not in the South Seas I should say that that was Dinas Mountain."

"Almost identical, some of these geological formations are," Rhys said stiffly.

The sun slid down the sky, rolling out a golden carpet to the far horizon; and the stars came out and danced in the dancing waters. Disappointed, the voyagers were, not to reach the land before nightfall. But, not wishing to founder on a lee shore, Eli dropped anchor; and, curling up in the galley, he dreamt of coconut palms and blue lagoons . . .

They were awakened by a bumping and a grinding and groaning of timbers. They ran up on to the sloping deck, to find that the waters had drained away as though Nature had pulled out a plug. The stars had paled, and the cold light of a new day was seeping into the sky. And, etched starkly against that clear light, they saw an unexpected skyline: the mud-caked façade of Dinas Town Hall; and beyond that the green slopes of Dinas Mountain.

"Maybe I did not allow sufficiently for wind resistance," muttered the disconcerted Rhys.

"Don't you worry, Mr. Rhys. Anyone could make a mistake of twelve thousand miles," Eli said cheerfully, gazing out across

a town that was already steaming in the first rays of the sun. Dinas had always been grey. Now, with a coating of mud, it looked even more unattractive than usual.

It was a depressing sight. But, as they gazed at the silent town, they were aware of a distant sound. Sweet it was, and far, the sound of Welsh voices singing in the clear morning. And down from the high slopes of the mountain came a long procession of men and women, the people of Dinas returning with song to their dripping homes.

Eli Shenkin addressed himself to his passengers. "Be wanting to get back to your Town Hall now, no doubt," he said hopefully. "And to your own little house, Megan."

Rhys the Planning shook his head. "Damp, the Town Hall looks to me," he said. "I propose to stay where I am."

Something snapped. Eli Shenkin was a patient and humble man, but he had had enough. Too much, in fact. "This is my ark," he said. "And if you are not all gone in two minutes I shall summon Constable Jones, whom I see approaching at the head of that procession, and I shall have you all ejected."

Hurt, everyone looked. Cadwallader began to howl. Megan took out her handkerchief, and Rhys the Planning put a protective arm round her. "Mrs. Thomas and I plan to wed," he told the astonished Eli. "And where better to spend our honeymoon than on this dry and comfortable ark?"

"Never!" cried Eli. "Off you go, all of you."

He began to shoo.

Rhys did not budge. Then he said, "Eli Shenkin, on the twentieth ult. you were served with a demolition order. Did you comply with it?"

Eli looked at him in astonishment. "Of course I did not. If I had, drowned you would all have been or dying of exposure on Dinas Mountain."

"That is quite irrelevant. You know the penalty for non-compliance. Six months."

"But I saved your lives."

"And very grateful we are too," Mr. Rhys said. "But the law is the law, and my duty to see that it is carried out. Constable Jones," he called, leaning over the side, "come up here a moment, will you?"

Chilly it was in Dinas Gaol. But Mr. Rhys and Megan had a nice honeymoon in the ark, in spite of the presence of Cadwallader. And by the time Eli came out of prison they had built themselves a nice, dry house on the slopes of Dinas Mountain, and Eli was able to have his ark back again.

Very much so, in fact. For when he went home and opened his front door, there on the red-and-blue tiles, lay two letters. He opened them, standing in the gloomy, gas- and cabbage-laden hall.

The first pointed out that the ark had come to rest against a NO WAITING sign, and summoned him to appear at the Magistrates Court on Tuesday. The other charged him with causing an obstruction outside the Town Hall, and gave him three days in which to remove the obstruction. Otherwise, the letter said, back to prison he would go.

And that is just what he did, flatly refusing to pay his parking fine or to move his ark. You can push a good man too far.

Well, what a tale of injustice, you will say. But there it is. Can't have a happy ending every time, can you now?

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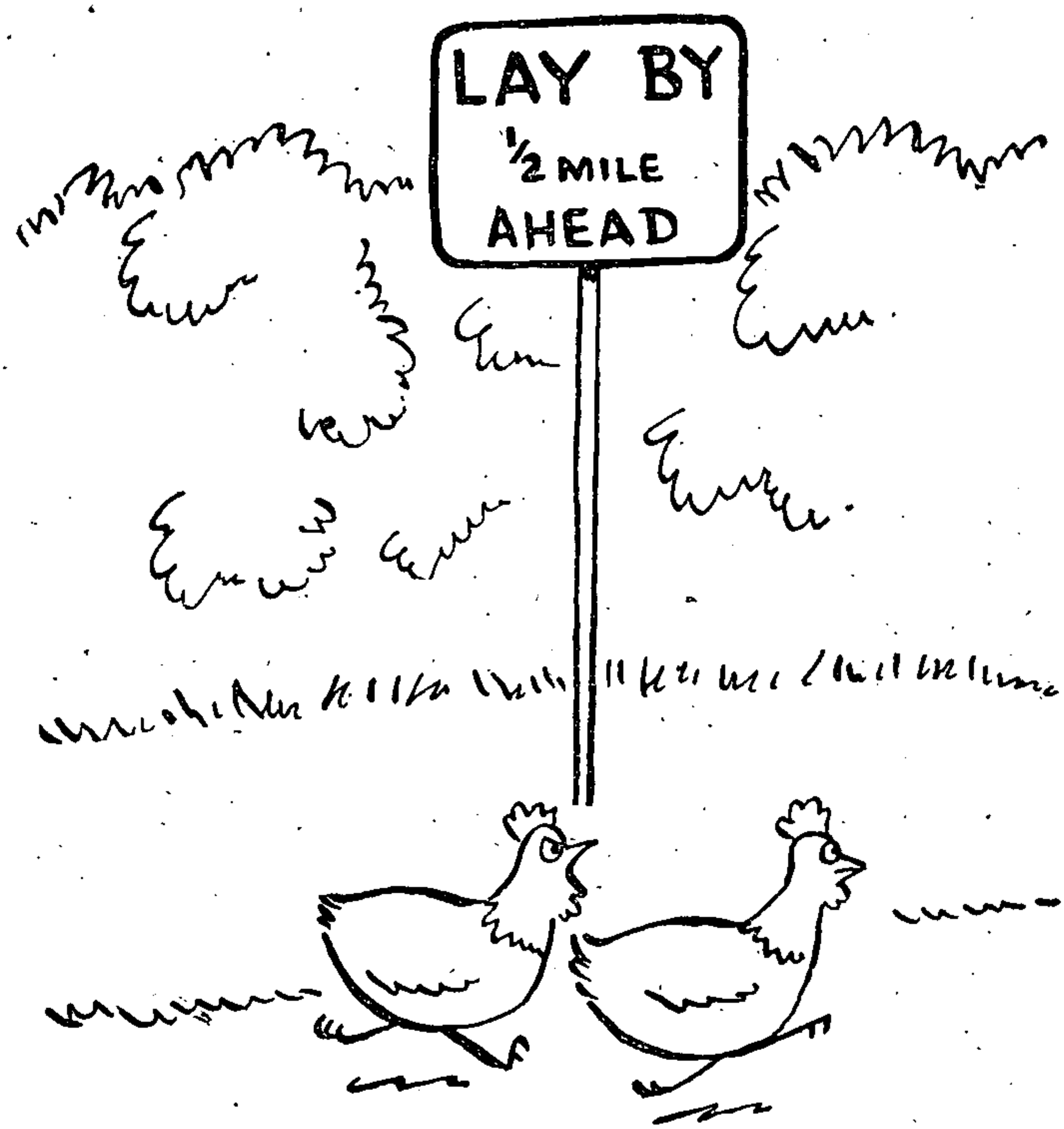
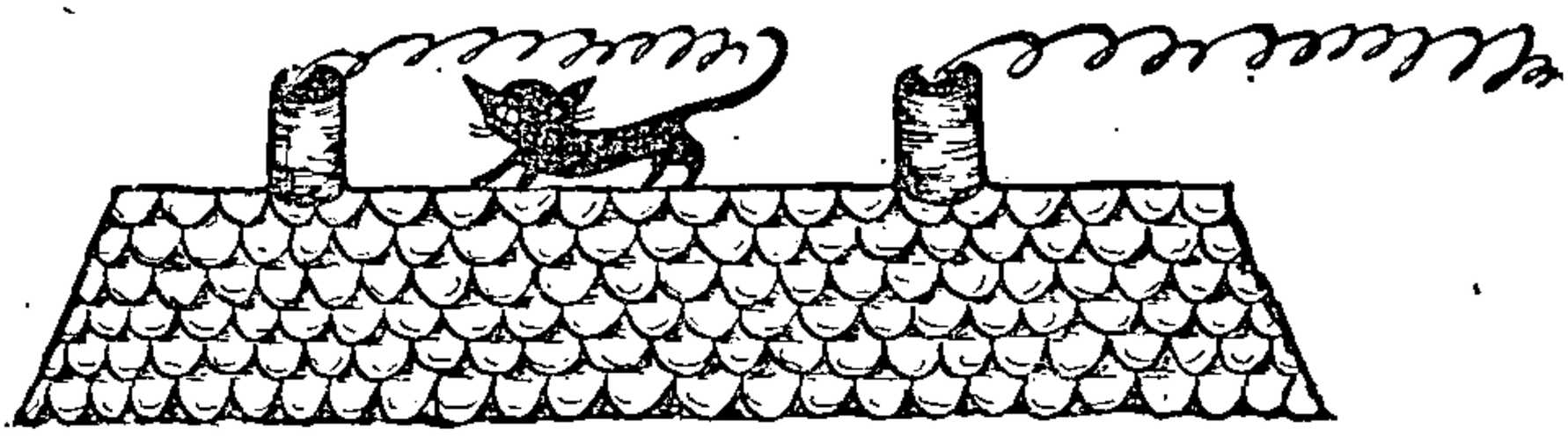



*" Don't think I'll make it."*



# ROOF OVERHEAD

**Heaven is not built of country seats**
**But little queer suburban streets.**

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

*Hall bedrooms, attic rooms, where the gas-ring sings,*
*rooms in the basement where the loud doorbell rings;*
*carpeted or bare, by the rail at the head of the stair,*
*the curtains drawn, a mirror, a bed, and a chair,*

*in midnight darkness, when the last footfall creaks,*
*in northeast rain, when the broken window leaks,*
*at dawn, to the sound of dishes, the kitchen steam,*
*at dusk, when the muted radio croons a dream,*

*there, amid combs and the waiting shoes and socks,*
*and the bathrobes hung in closets, tick the clocks:*
*on the chest of drawers, on the table beside the bed,*
*facing the pillow, facing the recumbent head:*

*yes, from here to forever, from here to never,*
*one long sidereal curve of ticking fever,*
*all down both sides of North Infinity Street*
*you hear that contrapuntal pawnshop beat.*

CONRAD AIKEN, *North Infinity Street*

## *Married Quarters*

Hussein was an Arab gentleman, with a nice wit, too. "Why don't you ask BAPCO [the oil company] to give you a house?" he asked, smiling.

"I was thinking of something a little more central." BAPCO was at Awali, nine miles away.

"Then perhaps you could share with another Englishman

along the Jufair road. The Agency might arrange it."

"I was thinking of something a little more Arab."

"In that case you should marry. Would you consider becoming a Muslim? I could find you a wife and then *she'd* have to find the house."

RODERIC OWEN, *The Golden Bubble*

## *Attic Shape—*

*Whenever I see old garrets I think of mice and cheese,*
*And slender, wistful poets who dream by candle-light,*
*I think of winds that shiver and wailing leafless trees,*
*And winding, wooden stairways that creak in hush of night . . .*
*Now a house that is rich and modern is a pleasant dwelling-place,*
*But a poet should live in a garret where the witching moonlight streams,*
*Alone with the whispering stars and apart from the world's mad race,*
*Reigning in indolent ease, a king in his palace of dreams!*

MORRIS ABEL BEER, *Old Garrets*

## *Be It Never So Humble*

These parlours are both too small for such parties of our friends as I hope to see often collected here; and I have some thoughts of throwing the passage into one of them . . . this, with a new drawing-room which may be easily added, and a bedchamber and garret above, will make it a very snug little cottage. I could wish the stairs were handsome. But one must not expect everything.

JANE AUSTEN, *Sense and Sensibility*

## *Sun Lounge*

*Where were we in that afternoon? And where*
*is the high room now, the bed on which you laid your hair*
*as bells beat early in the still air?*

*A two o'clock of sun and shutters. Oh, recall*
*the chair's angle—a stripe of shadow on the wall—*
*the hours we gathered in our hands, and then let fall.*

*Wrist on wrist, we relive memory: shell of moon*
*on day sky, two o'clock in lazy June—*
*and twenty years gone in an afternoon.*

RICHMOND LATTIMORE, *Anniversary*

## *Love Nest*

Prue paid £100 for four rooms, bathroom and kitchen, and was well satisfied with her bargain, for even if two of the rooms were small, and one tiny, they all got plenty of air and sun. She had her flat decorated to suit the Sheraton and old china, and her little home was infinitely the daintiest in Mammoth Mansions.

The best room made an exquisite drawing-room; the next largest became her bedroom and presented a view of many wardrobes, mirrors, and all the vanities of a vain and lovely woman.

The third made a cosy dining-room, where four could be squeezed in for a meal. The fourth room was, of course, Martha's bedroom, while the kitchen was as good as a flat kitchen ever is, and had a gas-stove and fair oven. Altogether, Prue, with her luxuriously furnished flat, and her own servant, was looked up on as a young woman of importance and property.

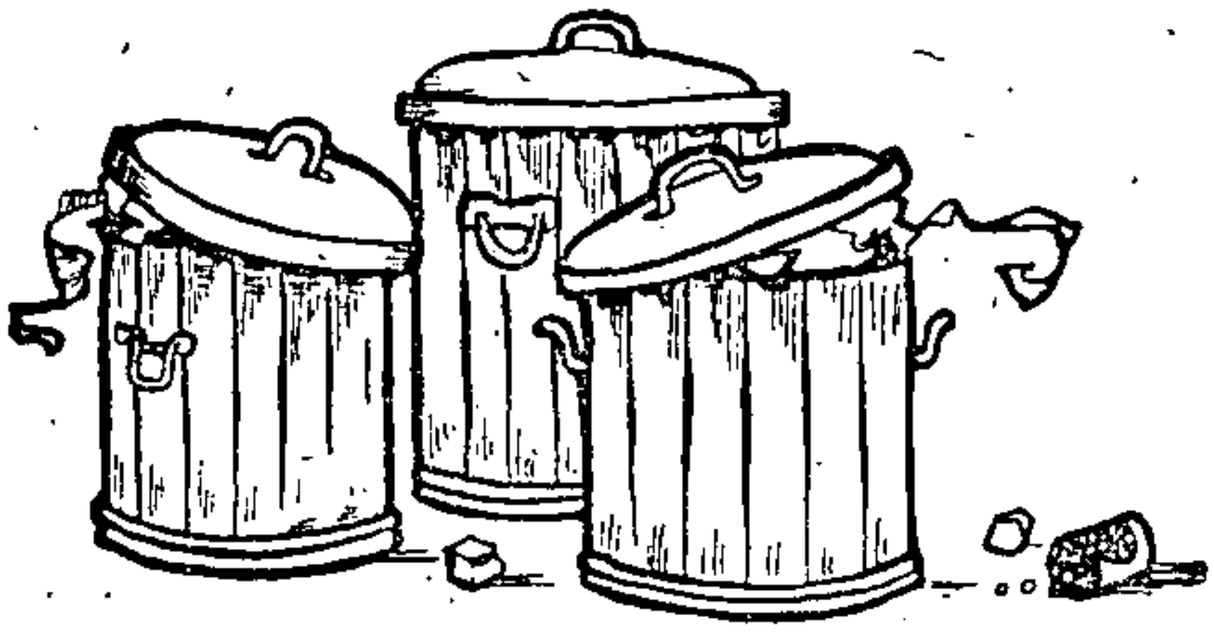
Even the mistress of the £300 flat, a lady of haughty mien, decided to call, having two sons who demanded birth, beauty, fortune, and a few other essentials in their wives—possibly to make up for their own lack of all.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN, *Improper Prue*

## *Love Seat*

*I am weary of tubular this and that,*
*I am bored with Contemporary fare;*
*Oh, give me a hairy sheepskin mat,*
*A chair that is wrong*
*—Picked up for a song—*
*And take that ominous rubber plant,*
*Brought by my indoor-gardening aunt,*
*Let it seek a setting more rich, more rare,*
*While deep in a chesterfield's dowdy ease—*
*Flowered chintz and herbaceous frieze—*
*I lay myself out myself to please.*

J. E. MALCOLM



# HIGH CONQUEST

*The man who is never afraid on a mountain*
*is lying, even to himself*

## BY JOHN DUNKEL

HE lay flat on his stomach on the frozen ground-sheet, only his head protruding from the low, silk tent. Thick snow-goggles and a fortnight's growth of beard obscured his face; a set, haunted look distorted its lines; on this desperate day in June, 1939, few people would have recognised him as the world-renowned geologist and mountain climber, Malcolm Nessbit.

He lay motionless, looking up the sheer face of the ice wall:—the last major obstacle before the summit of Kangchenjunga, third highest mountain in the world, and the most formidable. He lay quietly and watched the others, four tiny black specks inching up towards the goal to which he had aspired all his life. Leaving him behind . . .

He followed them closely, his face set: Wynter in the lead; Leopold, the American, second; Braun, the Austrian, third; and last, Pasang Chetta, the Sherpa gùide and porter. Four of the best mountaineers in the world, after Nessbit. And they were going on—to his triumph.

They were proving their skill. Only the greatest could inch up that precipitous wall of ice—slowly, painstakingly, cutting out every step with ice-axes. But they were winning; they were within two hundred feet of the top of the ice wall, eight hundred feet above Nessbit. Once they surmounted it, the way to the summit was comparatively simple. They would be the first—the only men ever to have scaled Kangchenjunga.

Now the climbers had reached a point Nessbit had long anticipated. They were just below an impossible overhang, a bulge of ice jutting out several feet over the abyss. He could see Wynter hanging on his rope, leaning far out, driving a piton.

Now was the time.

He raised the rifle, planted his elbow firmly on top of the snow wall. Carefully he centred the sight on Wynter's back, calculating for wind, distance, and trajectory. His finger tightened on the trigger.

He watched Wynter drive the piton, fix the rope, chop a small

handhold. He saw the rope signals exchanged, sensed Leopold bracing for the belay. He felt his own stomach tighten as Wynter's foot lifted for the outward swing.

He squeezed the trigger.

The Nessbit-Wynter ascent of Kangchenjunga took place in the summer of 1939, while the world tottered on the brink of war. But for Robert Leopold, the American, it had started the summer before when he had gone to Europe for some climbing in the Dolomites. There he had met an expert Austrian climber, a young man named Karl Braun—and through him, Malcolm Nessbit and his wife.

To Leopold, Nessbit was a legendary figure, with a world-wide reputation, so it was with great awe that he sat down to Nessbit's dinner-table that night. All Nessbit's achievements had a special glamour; even that famous, ill-starred attempt on the terrible K-2, from which only Nessbit and his native porter had returned alive.

It was no surprise to find him youthful in spite of his fifty-five years, trim, athletic, dashingly handsome with his iron-grey hair and deeply-tanned complexion. He had a suave, easy charm that immediately dispelled any nervousness on Leopold's part.

"I've read a lot about you fellows over there. What you've done in the Canadian Rockies and on the walls of the Yosemite."

The American smiled.

"We haven't done much to inspire envy in a man like you, sir."

Nessbit shook his head ruefully. "I'm afraid it's time I abdicated my position to the new generation coming on—young men like you and Braun here—and Wynter," he added, with a little secret smile at his wife.

She neither smiled nor returned his look.

"Are you enjoying climbing here, Mr. Leopold?" she asked, with a strange, cool detachment that made the question appear almost rhetorical.

Evelyn Nessbit was at least twenty years younger than her husband, blonde, and attractive.

"Very much," Leopold answered.

Braun asked suddenly, "Have you heard anything of Edward Wynter's project yet?"

"I'm afraid he hasn't chosen to confide in me," Nessbit answered stiffly.

"He's planning an attempt on Kangchenjunga next year."

"Edward is an ambitious young man. Well—he may succeed where I failed. It wouldn't be the first time a pupil has outstripped his teacher." Braun was staring at his plate, in sudden

embarrassment, but Nessbit seemed not to notice him, "You're going, too?"

"He has spoken of it."

"Kangchenjunga!" Leopold broke in excitedly. "What a challenge!"

Nessbit looked seriously at him. "Perhaps one of the greatest in climbing. Though it's not the king of mountains, it is certainly the crown prince. And in one sense, at least, it is the most formidable."

"It's the ice, isn't it?" Leopold asked.

"Principally. Everest is protected by a wall of peaks—but Kangchenjunga is always one jagged mass of snow and ice, the most treacherous mountain in existence." He glanced at his wife again, but now she betrayed no interest. "It's questionable whether it is humanly possible to conquer it," he continued, and suddenly there was emotion in his voice, "but it was always my fondest hope to do so."

There was an uneasy silence, then Braun said, "I really had no right to discuss it. Perhaps Wynter planned to speak to you—"

"Perhaps he did," Nessbit cut in. "And perhaps he will." He glanced again at his impassive wife.

It was in the autumn that Leopold, back in the States, learnt that Nessbit was included in Wynter's attempt on Kangchenjunga. In early December, Leopold received a letter from Nessbit himself offering him the chance to take part.

When he also received friendly letters from both Wynter and Braun, it was settled. The danger, the possibility that he might not return never crossed his mind.

He met the Nessbits in Calcutta and accompanied them to Darjeeling. The others had already been there a month, exploring the approaches to the mountain, and surveying routes.

The three young men stood waiting as the train came to a stop. Wynter, tall, fair, about thirty, looking intense and intelligent, with a warm humanity underlying his reserve.

Braun was even younger, stocky, with his broad, Austrian face, his slow, friendly smile, and the clear, wide-open, solemn eyes of mountain men.

Pierre Fonce, the French-Swiss, small, dark, wiry, merry, was under thirty also, with a weatherbeaten face too old for him and strong hands too large for his body.

Together with Leopold and Evelyn Nessbit, it was a young and vibrant group—except for Nessbit, whose iron-grey hair made him stand out like a Field Marshal among a squad of recruits. Even Wynter seemed very young in comparison.

When Wynter spoke, however, there was no mistaking the calm note of authority in his voice, or the good will. "We're glad to have you with us, Leopold," he greeted him.

All he said to Nessbit was, "You're looking fit, sir." And then he added, "Evelyn—" as if there was nothing more to say.

And as he took her hand briefly she glanced up, just for an instant, into Wynter's face, said, "Hullo, Edward," and looked away again.

Wynter had installed them in a comfortable house. They assembled in the living-room, and he gave Nessbit a progress report.

"You've already engaged the porters?"

"Yes. I have twenty of the best men on the rolls of the Himalaya Club. According to my calculations, we won't need any more."

"What? That's impossible! We'll need three times that number."

"I don't think so. With dehydrated food and lightweight equipment, I'm sure we can manage."

There was a moment of silence.

"Well—who's the head porter?"

"Pasang Chetta. I engaged him specially, because he was with you on K-2."

"And have you forgotten—" Nessbit's voice was brittle—"how that climb ended?"

Wynter stared at him. "If you have anything to say against Pasang Chetta—"

"I have nothing to say. If you've engaged him, that's all there is to it."

If Nessbit feared Pasang Chetta as bad luck for the expedition, he didn't show it next day when they met him. He greeted the Indian like an old friend, but his face was set in a bland smile that masked any emotion he might have felt. Pasang Chetta, like Fonce, was small and wiry, but Leopold could sense the steel in that frail body.

He smiled at all Leopold said, but offered little comment. Only when the American expressed the optimistic hope that they would attain their goal safely did Pasang say, "Yes, sahib If the gods are willing."

Nessbit, overhearing this, laughed harshly. "Still talking that rot, Pasang? I thought you'd have got over it by now."

Pasang said nothing and Leopold, embarrassed, put in quickly, "Well, let's hope they look kindly on us."

Base camp was established at the tiny native village of Lachen,

twenty miles from the summit, but within the shadow of the mountain. During the week at Darjeeling, Leopold had had his first glimpse of Kangchenjunga, forty miles away.

He had been awed by the sight then, but now, seen from its very shadow, it was no less impressive, for though the peak was hidden by spurs and buttresses, shrouded in clouds, still its massive presence was constantly felt, oppressive, chilling, malevolent.

The only feasible route, Wynter had decided and Nessbit had finally agreed, was up the glacier of Zemu, through the col named Muncap Gap, and up the fearful North-west Spur to the main ridge. The way was almost straight up; they would be in an uncharted world of lonely terror and lurking death.

At one place it was said, a precipice dropped straight down fourteen thousand feet.

They left Lachen and began the upward toil, a thin, curling, centipede, twenty-six pairs of legs connected by the hair-thin line of rope, writhing darkly through the whitish rock debris beside the glacier-fed stream. Camp I was made that night on the terminal moraine of the glacier Here the first unfortunate incident took place.

In full view of the others, Nessbit struck Pasang Chetta. The Indian, who had merely attempted to help by carrying Nessbit's personal rucksack to his tent, fell back under the blow.

"Nessbit, pull yourself together," Wynter said sharply.

The two men turned, glaring at each other until Pasang had walked away.

"You know better than that, for heaven's sake. These men are reluctant enough without our mishandling them."

"Mishandling them! He deserved it. I allow no one to touch my pack on a climb."

"All right! If you want such absurd restrictions, give the orders. But keep your hands off the porters."

Nessbit glared at him another moment, then turned and strode to his tent.

The others were left in a little knot around Wynter. After a moment, Braun said, "It looks like much trouble. Better to send him back now than later, Edward."

"We can't do that, Karl. Not to him." He paused and drew a deep breath. "It will be all right. I'll talk to him."

Wynter's talk with Nessbit must have been successful, for next morning the older man was more co-operative. When they were packed and ready, he took the lead, moving out on to the glacier with easy assurance.

It was slow going up that long incline, plodding through the

soft snow blanket over the ice. By mid afternoon they were deep in the glacial trough in the shadow of the mountain. It was a world of breathtaking grandeur.

To the west towered the delicate blue ice towers of Siniolchu, the world's most beautiful mountain; to the north-west, the top of the Makalu, and beyond Chomolungma, the Goddess Mother of the World—Everest. Up here, there was no evidence of life. Only the wind and the occasional thunder of an avalanche broke the stillness.

They came to an unusually wide crevasse, yawning into black unknown depths. The only means of crossing it, to avoid an hour-long detour, was a flimsy snow bridge. They decided to try it.

With Leopold and Fonce both sitting anchored in the snow, belaying, Nessbit inched his way out on his stomach. Carefully he moved across. The bridge held.

Then, with Nessbit belaying on one side and Fonce and Braun on the other, it was Leopold's turn. Gingerly he wriggled out on to the thin, crusty snow. Slowly he crawled forward, out to the middle where the snow was no more than three feet across. On both sides the dark chasm waited.

Suddenly he felt the snow give way. With a sickening twist of his stomach he felt himself falling—one of the belays had not held. An ice-axe hurtled past him.

The rope tautened around his chest with a crushing jolt; he tried desperately to breathe, but could not. He was hanging suspended in the crevasse, a few feet out from the down-slope wall. The rope to the up-slope side, Nessbit's side, was limp. He had a vivid impression of the fantastic, deep-blue colouring of the ice around him darkening with each foot downward into blackness which seemed to speed towards him, engulfing him . . .

When he regained consciousness, he was lying on his stomach and someone was giving him artificial respiration.

They made camp there on the glacier beside the crevasse, and put him into his sleeping-bag in a warmed tent. Wynter ran gentle fingers over his rib cage and pronounced him all right.

Nessbit was not in sight. "Is Nessbit all right?" Leopold asked. "I didn't drag him in, too, did I?"

Wynter and Braun exchanged guarded looks. "No, he managed to catch himself." Then, after a pause, Braun added, "He lost his belay point."

Of course, Leopold thought, remembering the ice-axe falling past him. Nessbit had not driven it deeply enough into the ice beneath the snow—the most dangerous kind of carelessness. If Fonce and Braun on the other side had not been firmly enough anchored, Leopold—and perhaps others—would have been dead.

Before dark, Nessbit stepped into the half light of the tent. For a moment, he stood above Leopold, his face hidden, his hands clenched. When his voice came, it was rasping, intense, almost angry. " I'm sorry," was all he said.

" Could have happened to anyone," Leopold answered.

Nessbit stood for another moment, silent. Then he turned and went out.

Avalanches are the greatest single danger encountered on an ascent of a major peak. Their roar had been heard ever since leaving Lachen. By the middle of the fourth day, at about seventeen thousand feet, they sighted a big one.

Five hundred feet above their path a huge, hanging cornice of dry snow had built up at the head of a steep couloir. On the other side, the canyon was sheer and there was no way to avoid crossing directly under the menace.

The party gathered to look it over.

" Could we blast it down? " Leopold asked quietly. " One small charge should do it."

Wynter shook his head. " Too much danger of bringing down a bigger one from above."

Braun shrugged. " Nothing to do but go on, then."

" Right. Only carefully.. Keep well spaced. And not a sound; Pasang still believes that a shout can bring it down on us."

The long line trailed into the danger zone, under the overhang. They walked as fast as possible in the snow, but carefully, quietly, almost tiptoeing, without a word spoken, hardly daring to breathe. Slowly the line passed, until only Leopold and Pasang Chetta were under the couloir. In a few seconds they would all be out of danger.

Suddenly there was a sharp cry—" Aiee! "—as if someone had shouted in fright.

Then, almost instantly, Leopold heard the snow movement start. " Run! " he yelled, and plunged forward. He couldn't see the avalanche, but he could hear it.

There was no pressure on his rope, so he knew that Pasang was running, too. Another second and . . .

Leopold made it. He heard the snow swish past behind him. Instantly he whirled and dug his heels into the hard-packed snow, grasping the rope with both hands. Immediately the tension came: Pasang, at the end of the rope, was caught in the avalanche.

But the tension was not great; Leopold was able to hold steady against it. Evidently Pasang was caught only by the edge. And the avalanche was past now, thundering below. Still, the Indian was in great danger.

Leopold wore the usual bandanna round his neck while climbing. He slipped it over his nose and mouth, and plunged into the ice cloud, moving rapidly hand over hand on the rope.

Pasang, trapped waist-deep in the snow, had been pushed half off the rim of the path.

Working only by feel in the blinding cloud, Leopold pulled him loose and, half leading, half carrying, brought him out. Once outside, Pasang collapsed.

It had all taken less than a minute. By the time the others got there, Leopold was pumping air into the Indian's lungs.

"Good work, Robert! Are you all right, Pasang?" Wynter asked.

Pasang grinned and nodded; then he looked at Leopold and smiled, and only his eyes spoke his thanks.

"Who called out?" Wynter asked.

Braun looked at Nessbit, and even before he spoke, they all knew.

"It was involuntary on my part," he said. "I slipped."

That night Nessbit disappeared into his tent as soon as it was up. Leopold found himself the object of much solicitous attention from Pasang and when, during the evening meal, the Indian brought him a second cup of steaming hot tea, the American laughed. "Thanks, Pasang. But you're the one who should be taking it easy."

"All right now." Pasang grinned. And then he dropped his eyes and sobered somewhat. "For a little."

"What do you mean, for a little?"

"It is, perhaps, an omen. I have angered the mountain gods."

Leopold snorted. "Nonsense! It was an accident."

Now it was the turn of Braun, who had been listening, to snort.

"If it *was* an accident at all. Pasang, would he have any reason to do a thing like that—on purpose?"

Pasang returned the questioning stare. "If I slip," he answered slowly, "I, too, cry out *aiee*, just so."

Then he shrugged and turned away.

On the sixth day, they reached the fearful North-west Spur, a fantastic world of upthrust blocks, enormous, weird mushrooms of ice—a menacing labyrinth of death, poised on almost vertical slopes.

Progress was slow, and Camp VI was made late in the day on an icy shelf at just over twenty thousand feet. There they left the last of the porters.

From there, only Pasang Chetta and the Number Two man were to accompany the climbers.

At this altitude breathing was difficult, every action was weighted with effort, exhaustion came easily. They had been lucky so far with the weather. But on the seventh day, in the middle of the afternoon, they sighted far to the south an advancing line of thunderheads. Wynter eyed them anxiously.

By four o'clock, it was apparent that there were others closing in on Kangchenjunga. The sky behind the peak was becoming an ominous, sickly green-black. "It looks bad," Wynter admitted. "We're in for a blizzard."

Nessbit's voice was suddenly shrill with nervousness. "We can't possibly make it back to Camp VI."

"No," Wynter answered with deliberate calm. "We'll have to find a place to hole up in."

They found it on a narrow ledge just under the lip of the ridge. Working with their axes, they hollowed out a cave in the ice, laid ground-sheets, drove pitons, and secured a tent section across the narrow opening. It was a small enclosure; there was just room enough for them all, lying in a row together.

The storm struck before dark. First an ominous quiet. Then sudden lightning, and thunder that seemed to shake the mountain, followed by a howling wind and snow. The temperature dropped to ten below zero and the snow drifted deep on the ledge outside and sifted in through the cracks, but they remained fairly comfortable in their sleeping-bags, pressed together in the limited space.

Morning found them still secure. They had plenty of supplies, which was lucky, for the storm showed no sign of letting up and Wynter estimated that it might last three or four days.

It lasted three. Through it all, Nessbit remained morose and quiet, rarely speaking.

On the third day, with the possibility of death now present in everyone's mind, the ice cave was wrapped in silence most of the time. Only sporadically was an attempt made at conversation.

It was Fonce who started. "It is times like this," he began, "that make me think the others may be right."

"What others?" Leopold asked.

"All the others who don't climb mountains. The people who look at us as if we were insane. You know, it is possible that they are right."

The attempt to lighten the gloom was acknowledged with a general polite chuckle. They knew he was trying.

Fonce went on lightly, "For me, climbing is simply good-fellowship. I can be with people I like, and it's very jolly. I could blame it all on my parents who, when I was learning to walk, always turned me uphill so I would not fall so far."

Braun waited for another chuckle and then said, "There's something more than that for me. Maybe it is freedom. Nowhere else do I feel such a sense of being free."

"Yes, that too. But aren't you afraid sometimes?"

"Of course. The fear of freedom is one of man's most basic fears. It is the fear of being alone."

"Freedom—rot!" Nessbit interposed. "The secret lies in power—in conquest. I can't conquer nations, but I can conquer mountains."

"And you are never afraid?." Fonce asked very softly.

"No, of course not. If I were afraid, I shouldn't be here."

The silence hung, pregnant with antagonism, in the little ice chamber. Then Braun spoke again, with decision and sharp strength. "I believe that a man who says he is never afraid on a mountain is lying even to himself. I believe that a man who is driven to climb, not by love but by the desire for power, for conquest—he is the most afraid of all."

Nessbit reared up from his prone position, enraged. But Wynter spoke first. "I believe you are right. For such a man is trying to conquer not the mountain, but himself. His own fear."

Now Nessbit transferred his rage to the new speaker. "Look here, Wynter—" he began. But Wynter interrupted him—"For that reason, he deserves sympathy and help."

For an instant, Nessbit balanced there on his elbow, his face white and contorted. Then, with something like a sob, he burst out, "Damn you, Wynter! I won't be insulted and I won't be patronised! You'll apologise, damn you!" And he tried to lunge across Leopold towards Wynter.

With one arm, the American flung him down.

Nessbit struggled vainly for a moment and then went limp. "Damn you! Damn you all!"

Wynter said, without a trace of rancour, "In one way, I'm glad it's out in the open at last. We can't go on like this any longer, Nessbit. We'll have to return to Camp VI for more supplies, and you can stay there."

There was a long, deep silence in the cave. Then, in a strangled voice, Nessbit spoke, "This is your plan to discredit me with Evelyn, isn't it? You think if you make me out a coward, she will leave me for you. Isn't that it?"

"Please, this isn't the time."

"Can you deny you're in love with her?"

There was an instant's pause. "That is a matter that concerns no one but me, Nessbit. I have kept it that way and always will. I'm sorry this had to happen, but I think I can promise you none of us will ever speak of it again."

By nightfall the storm was tapering off. Some time later, when darkness blackened the little cave, and Leopold was dozing, Nessbit spoke again.

"Wynter, are you awake?"

"Yes."

Leopold, lying between them and wide awake again, couldn't avoid hearing their talk.

"Listen, Edward—if I tell you that this is the great crisis of my life—if I tell you I must go on or die—"

"Malcolm, if it were only myself—but I'm responsible for the lives of all of the others."

"All right." There was a bitter edge on the voice now. "Will you at least spare me one humiliation? Will you allow me to stay here? Someone has to maintain this camp."

Wynter paused, debating this. Finally, "All right," he said.

Then the little cave was quiet.

Next morning the sky was overcast but the party prepared to move back to Camp VI.

"Nessbit and Fonce will stay here," Wynter directed. No one expressed any surprise: Fonce was the logical second choice because the little man had been tiring faster than the others.

They left just after dawn. On the now-familiar route they made good time, and got safely back to the ice edge just as darkness closed in.

The ice cave was empty.

They found Fonce's note pinned to his sleeping-bag: *Nessbit gone off by himself. I'm going out to search for him.*

Wynter's face was white as he read the note. "I should have guessed . . . I should never have allowed him to persuade me."

"You can't blame yourself for this, Edward. Lord, the man must be crazy," Leopold said.

With the ridge in deep darkness, there was no hope of a successful search until morning. Instead, they took turns in calling and flashing a light as a beacon. About two hours after dark, Fonce stumbled into camp, near exhaustion, hardly able to walk on his numbed feet.

Safely in the cave, with Leopold cutting off his boots and Braun packing his frostbitten hands, Fonce told them what had happened.

"Nessbit left soon after you did. He said he was going ahead to scout the route. I couldn't stop him—if you could have seen him . . . Then, in mid afternoon when he wasn't back, I went out to look for him.

"I didn't mean to go far, I followed his tracks up the ridge,

always expecting to find him over the next rise. Then darkness came. I wasn't far, not more than a half mile up the ridge, but it came too fast and caught me. I tried to follow my own tracks by crawling on my hands and knees. Then I saw your light."

"Thank God," said Wynter.

He looked at Fonce's feet. "Those must have attention as soon as possible."

Fonce's face was drawn but composed. "I'm through?" he asked simply.

"I'm afraid so, Pierre."

Getting Fonce down to Camp VI consumed another whole day. From there porters were detailed to carry him to the hospital in Darjeeling.

Hardly a thought had been given to Nessbit. It was almost certain that he was dead. Still, they must search for him.

So, at dawn of the third day after the storm, they started up the ridge. Fonce's deep trail was still visible, but two days of wind had almost obliterated Nessbit's. They were able to see where he had doubled back and set out on a new route, a traverse that started by descending from the ridge.

Only when they reached the ridge again did they find why Nessbit had made the detour. The ridge behind them was split in a deep chasm, one that was impossible to bridge.

Five hundred yards on up the ridge they found evidence of Nessbit's first night camp holed into the snow. The next day they continued to see scattered signs of Nessbit's passing, and in the late morning they came upon his second camp.

Wynter shook his head in amazement. "Alive," he said, "and still going."

"Leading us to the top." Leopold couldn't keep the admiration from his voice.

They made a second camp—it would be Camp IX—just under twenty-five thousand feet and, the next morning, pushed on.

It was hard going now. They were moving too fast; ordinarily it would have taken much longer to get this high, but now every man was anxious, not so much to reach the top, as to overtake Nessbit.

Early that afternoon they saw him. "Look!" Braun called, pointing. And there, high above them, was a black dot on the knifelike ice spine.

Wynter studied him through glasses. "He's going up—on his knees, chopping holds in the ice."

"The fool. The magnificent fool," Leopold said.

"Come on. We'll catch him by nightfall."

They met again at the foot of the ice wall.

Nessbit beat them there by almost a thousand yards. He must have seen them behind him, but he kept on climbing. Then he came to the ice wall, and he stopped. There was nothing else he could do: one man alone could never hope to scale it.

It was a thousand feet of sheer ice, perpendicular or worse. In some places it bent back in an overhang.

Nessbit had begun already to chop his hole in the ice when they arrived. He stood in front of it, facing them, his face set, expressionless.

Wynter stopped and looked at him. Then he smiled. "Damned good work, Malcolm. I wouldn't have believed it possible."

Nessbit stared haughtily at Wynter.

"And yet, magnificent as this was, you shouldn't have done it. It was foolhardy."

"It's my own life," Nessbit answered sharply.

"It was Fonce's, too. He almost lost it, searching for you. They may still have to amputate . . ."

Nessbit's defence cracked. He dropped his eyes and said, almost as if in anger, "He shouldn't have. I told him not to." Then he added, a little brokenly, "I'm sorry this happened."

Wynter's voice softened. "That is best forgotten now. It would be foolish not to call it quits and go on together. We're within sight of victory, and it's your victory, too." And he held out his hand.

Nessbit only stared at him. Finally he answered, "I don't think I can do that."

"But, you can't go up that wall alone! It's not possible!"

"It's my life, to do with as I like."

"Of course. I have no authority over you now," Wynter said.

Later Leopold took Nessbit's food to him in his tent, where he was sitting on his bed-roll, motionless.

After an instant's pause the voice came, courteously, "Thank you, Leopold." Its tone betrayed no hostility.

Leopold asked, "May I sit down?" and at the other's nod he squatted on the bed-roll. But in moving within the cramped space he had jostled Nessbit's rucksack, and its flap fell open. Something protruded from the pack.

"Well, I'll be damned. What's that?" Leopold asked.

Nessbit started in surprise, then quickly recovered. "As you see, a gun," he answered, with a little smile.

"Why?" asked the American in genuine astonishment.

Nessbit smiled again. "Call it superstition, I always carry it with me on a climb. A sort of good-luck piece."

"But the weight of it—climbing this high . . ."

Nessbit shrugged. " It's quite light. I had it specially made. It's surprisingly powerful, and accurate up to four hundred yards."

Leopold shook his head, smiling dubiously. " Look, Nessbit," he said, coming to the point. " We want you to know, Braun and I, that we agree absolutely with Wynter, and we want you with us."

" Thank you, Leopold."

" And we need you. It's going to be a tough job tomorrow, and every good hand will help."

Nessbit nodded, paused. Then he asked, with a strange look, " Does Pasang Chetta want me, too? "

Leopold blinked in surprise.

" He's said nothing at all about me? "

" No. Why should he? "

Nessbit shrugged and then Leopold remembered. " Oh, that business down below—that's all forgotten, I'm sure."

Nessbit was silent a moment. " I'll think about it, Leopold. Thank you for coming."

The morning was perfect for that final spectacular try for the summit, the kind of weather mountaineers pray for; it was incredible good luck they should have it that day.

Pasang Chetta smiled, looking up.

Leopold, seeing him, said, " It seems as if the god of the mountain is smiling on us today. Inviting us up."

Pasang turned, still smiling, and answered softly, " Yes, sahib. But the smile of a god is full of treachery." Then he glanced up again, this time at the ice wall before them, beautiful as it glistened with the reflected gold of the morning light.

When Leopold went to the tent, Nessbit still lay in his sleeping-bag. He looked up and smiled weakly. " It seems the decision has been made for me," he said. " Mountain sickness." His face was drawn with suffering.

" Perhaps it will pass," Leopold exclaimed. " We can wait."

Nessbit shook his head emphatically. " With weather like this? No! Mustn't take a chance of losing it now. Too dangerous. It can't last."

Wynter, too, offered to wait, but Nessbit was adamant. " Luck is with you. Go on up. I'll be waiting here when you get back. Good luck." There was no rancour in his tone.

Only Pasang Chetta stood a little apart, studying Nessbit with a thoughtful frown.

The four men started up the ice wall at seven in the morning. It was almost noon when they reached the eight-hundred-foot

level and met the dangerous overhang which they must bypass.

Nessbit, lying half out of his tent, had been watching them all morning, emotion seething within him.

They were winning—that was apparent to him.

Oh, yes, he could have been there. They had offered to wait for him, but waiting would have been futile. Mountain sickness passes, but Nessbit's feet had been frostbitten since he had been forced to make his third solitary camp in a place exposed to the wind.

He knew the price of his folly, he knew it very well. The emotions that shook him were what might have been expected. And pervading all, a feeling, a knowledge, an acceptance, common to those who climb mountains, enter battle—to all men who go calmly to meet death.

As Nessbit would meet it soon. That was certain, had been certain for two days. Meet it here, on the highest slopes of one of the world's greatest mountains.

But he would not meet it alone . . .

He saw Wynter drive his piton, saw the rope signals exchanged. The gunsight was centred squarely on Wynter's back. As the climber thrust out to the limit of his balance, Nessbit squeezed the trigger.

He felt the kick of the rifle, heard the sharp crack ricocheting echoes off the broken walls of the peak. Then he looked up suddenly and he saw it—the ice wall, thousands of tons of ice, cracking off, coming down on him.

The story of that rescue is one of the most famous in the annals of mountaineering. It was miraculous, even from the beginning. What, for instance, caused the ice wall to crack just where it did? Could it have been that, as Pasang Chetta murmured with a remote smile, "We were favoured in the eyes of the god of the mountain?"

All that is certain is that the ice wall split a few feet to the side of the climbers, that is, a few feet from the lower three. Above them, the split twisted sharply, and when Leopold looked up, he saw Wynter hanging, helpless, on the edge of an abyss.

And then Leopold saw the spreading stain on his parka.

Leopold reached Wynter just before he lost his grip on the ice, then supported him somehow until Braun fashioned the rope sling that was to carry Wynter's body. Pasang Chetta half guided, half carried the load down the wall as the others belayed with ropes from above.

Once down from the wall, they found that Wynter's wound was one which would not have been serious on the plain. But here,

with temperatures freezing by day and below zero at night, it might be fatal.

Already Wynter had lapsed into shock coma. They administered first aid and wrapped him warmly, using everything they had in their packs, each man contributing a part of the clothing from his own back.

As a feat of courage, that descent was unsurpassed. They moved night and day, stopping only to melt snow in which they dissolved vitamin pills, and to force the mixture down the throat of the injured man.

They had been without food for forty-eight hours and Leopold and Braun were approaching exhaustion. So, on that last terrible cliff, it was Pasang Chetta, the Sherpa guide, who strapped Wynter firmly to his back and carried him down the steep avalanche chute.

Wynter reached the hospital in Darjeeling on the third night, fifty-nine hours after his wounding. He was more dead than alive.

Behind them, at the foot of the ice wall, lay an enormous waste of scattered, broken, jagged ice, millions of tons of it, weirdly heaped into a minor mountain system, glistening coldly in the silent moonlight. Beneath it, a body lay crushed. There had been no hope of reaching it, and no point in trying. No one had even looked back at the mountain of ice. Malcolm Nessbit lay in the grave he had fashioned for himself . . .

There were two days of helpless waiting before they were assured by the doctors that Wynter would recover. Then, for the first time, they could relax.

Standing in the hall outside Wynter's sickroom, Leopold spoke, with slow emphasis. " It was my fault. I knew he had the gun. I should have—"

" If it was anybody's fault," Pasang's quiet voice came in, " it was mine. There is something I should have told you."

His eyes were distant, gazing into the past. " We were above twenty-two thousand feet on K-2. He and I had reached the top of a steep cliff, the others came behind us, spaced along a narrow ledge. Somehow the last man fell, and one by one the others were pulled off after him. But all were still roped together."

He paused a moment. " It happened very quickly, of course. When the shock came, it was very great. I was being dragged towards the edge. Perhaps we could have held it, perhaps not."

" You mean," Braun said slowly, incredulity in his voice, " he cut the rope? " Pasang nodded.

For several minutes no one spoke.

Then Braun said, " For one moment of panic, a man's life is ruined. Better he should have died then."

Leopold said, " He was trying to redeem himself. And he almost succeeded. It took courage to come on this trip at all."

" But at the end? What of that? "

" Yes. Why did he do that? After he had won his victory over himself. Could it have been that he couldn't stand seeing us, younger men, surpass him? "

" Perhaps," Braun answered a little impatiently. " But more likely it was that he knew we had guessed his secret, that he was really a coward. And he couldn't stand that. He had to silence us."

" He faced death alone up there. That took courage."

" It took madness. Perhaps that's the only answer."

Pasang Chetta said softly, " The revenge of the mountain gods comes in strange ways."

Before they left the hospital, they looked in again on Wynter. Evelyn Nessbit sat quietly beside the bed, her face bleak with exhaustion and suffering. But she smiled gently and nodded a good-bye to them.

Outside, Braun stopped suddenly and asked, " Or is it possible that Nessbit actually loved someone more than himself? "

Leopold returned to India some years later. He went to Darjeeling and looked up Pasang Chetta. The porter was over forty now, and he wasn't climbing any more. But together they ascended the little promontory of Tiger Hill and from that famous tourist viewpoint watched the sunrise on Kangchenjunga, forty miles away.

Presently, the first shaft of sunlight struck the pinnacle and, ricocheting off the ice like a bullet from steel, fired a sudden dazzling nova in the dark sky. Flowing swiftly down, like golden lava, it highlighted the entire peak, and finally spread out across the long central ridge, until the whole mountain blazed in golden brilliance above the still-dark valleys below. Here, here was glory.

Tiger Hill has the usual tourist plaque, telling the story of the mountain it faces. But now Leopold noticed a new one encircled with a bronze wreath. It read: *In memory of Malcolm Nessbit, who met his death near the summit of Kangchenjunga, June* 7, 1939.

Staring at it, Leopold was back for a moment on the ice wall, remembering it all. And the men. Nessbit, Fonce, Wynter. Remembering, too, the older greying Wynter he had seen when passing through London. Wynter, quietly happy with his wife, Evelyn, and their child.

And Fonce, whom he had found in Grenoble, walking a little clumsily on his metal feet, but still Fonce, still merry. And

Braun, back once again in his native Austrian mountains.

And what, thought Leopold, had the experience done for *him*? He had seen courage and pride, been made to understand the value of one and the danger of the other. Perhaps he had simply grown up a little, emerged a calmer, wiser man. Perhaps.

But youth was still stirring within him and the challenge was still there on the mountain.

" Pasang," he asked, " do the mountain gods ever give a second chance? "

Pasang gazed questioningly at him, then down to the plaque. " Perhaps—for one as young as you, sahib major. Who can say? But for me—" and his eyes went back up to the mountain—" for me—not in this life. But after . . ."

And he smiled, a smile of communion with his gods.

★ ★ ★

## *SOLUTIONS to CATS AND DOGS on page* 14

1. *a. shoal in the North Sea, between Britain and Denmark; b. arm of the sea between Sweden and Denmark.*
2. *a. G. A. Henty; b. Conan Doyle.*
3. *From 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. Period varying from 42 to 56 days, beginning between July 3rd and August 15th (generally July 3rd to August 11th).*
4. *a. Dogrose; b. Club rush, or reed mace; c. Dogwood.*
5. *Aesop.*
6. *Dr. Johnson.*
7. *They are both dogfish.*
8. *a. Thomas Gray; b. William Cowper.*
9. *Boots.*

## *SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page* 144

Across
1, *Carapace.* 5, *Martin.* 9, *Mantilla.* 10, *Scarab.* 12, *United.* 13, *Serenade.* 15, *Ostentatious.* 18, *Country dance.* 23, *Temporal.* 24, *Elvira.* 26, *Titian.* 27, *Hardship.* 28, *Caller.* 29, *Stone-saw.*
Down
1, *Campus.* 2, *Rancid.* 3, *Primers.* 4, *Colt.* 6, *Ancient.* 7, *Toreador.* 8, *Noblesse.* 11, *Best man.* 14, *New Year.* 16, *Ecstatic.* 17, *Gun-metal.* 19, *Too late.* 20, *Calydon.* 21, *Lights.* 22, *Pawpaw.* 25, *Salt.*

# CUCKOO FIELD

*The chimps were in the back*
*gibbering with excitement*

## BY PATRICIA SIBLEY

TOM walked into the ring and held out his hands. The two chimpanzees ran to him with the eagerness of little children coming home. Just for a moment, because this was the last time ever, he stood there, letting the wave of trumpets, heat, animals, and many faces sweep over him, then turned away—Victoria clutching his right hand, Albert his left—turned away out of the tent for the last time. No one in the audience noticed the huge, blond man; the clowns were already throwing sausages.

Outside, the long summer day was rolling westward. Tom went slowly across the trodden grass, looking at things he had never noticed before, how canvas turned golden at sunset, litter in the grass, and elephants' huge footprints, boys' heads peering above a distant fence, the sudden quiet out there; but none of it had any meaning, except the trusting hands of the chimps.

Albert tugged at him. Come on, it was supper-time. But Victoria was worried. Dark circles in the skin round her eyes made her look perpetually sad; tonight there was a reason.

The van had gone, Tom's van, her van. Suddenly she screwed a fist into one eye and began to whimper. Albert scratched his head and looked at Tom. Women were difficult.

All the same he was worried, too: the van had gone.

Tom unlocked the door of their travelling cage. They went in and sat down on the straw while he fetched their bread and milk. Then he went in, too, and settled down between them while they ate. That did not take long. Soon they were scrambling over him, rummaging for the apples that were always in his pockets. When Victoria had finished hers she fished out his pipe and began to suck it lovingly. Albert undid his shoe laces.

And now he did not know how to leave them, should never have let this evening ritual begin, should have slammed the door on them and gone away quickly into the world that was waiting.

"Look, chaps, I'm going away," he whispered to them. They listened earnestly. "Going away to the country. Sam's going to look after you. You'll be all right."

He looked down at them both. Had he been a fool? Was all the year's planning to come to this, a chimp's head on his shoulder?

Well, he need not go. Fleming would be only too glad if he changed his mind. A final roar of applause was shaking the big top. He would have to decide at once.

Albert was wrapping himself in his favourite piece of sacking. They might pine, not eat, not sleep. "Look, chaps," he began . . .

Then there were people everywhere, animals, chatter, lights, an elephant passing, and a bright voice calling through the bars, "Tom, Tom, we want you."

A pebble shattering their little pool of peace. We want you. Why should they? No one had ever wanted him before, except the chimps. He put Victoria gently back into the straw and went outside.

"Got a surprise for you," said the voice. Yvonne.

"Wake up, Tom. Dad's throwing a party for you."

Yvonne, the proprietor's daughter, was taking his arm.

Except that her skin was pink and white between the ringlets, Yvonne was the sort of young woman used to advertise holiday resorts, a figure all bays and promontories. She was in a rustling scarlet tutu, still hot and panting from a triumphant bareback promenade of the ring. With his new vision Tom was truly aware of her for the first time. He opened his nostrils—cheap scent and animal. And this spangled creature pressed itself warmly against his arm.

"Aren't you just the sly old puss," she babbled on in her husky voice. "Creeping out on us like this? Is she pretty? Guess she must be."

"Who?" he asked stupidly.

"Why, your sweetie-pie!" she said archly, tugging him across the ground to the big Fleming trailer.

"Hullo, hullo, hullo, Tom. What, didn't bring the chimps?"

"Here, Tom, what's all this about you leaving us?"

"Drink that down, mate, and you won't be able to leave us!"

Roars of laughter, faces floating in smoke, chinking of glasses against his own. Yvonne very close. Fleming anxious with plates and bottles.

"Here, Tom, tell us where you're off to."

"Yes, where'd you sneak off to with your old van yesterday?"

"Oh, just out near the sea," he said shyly.

"Well, you might have brought her along to see us."

"Got a snap of her, Tom?"

He looked worriedly round the encircling faces. "No girl," he said simply.

Into the heat of their clamour came this sudden drop of quiet. No girl. Just like that. You could not doubt the man. He had no guile.

"Why, Tom, surely you're not just going off on your lonesome? We kind of took it for granted . . ." someone said at last.

"Got a farm job," he said.

"But you'll be lonely, mate."

"Going to get . . . a dog . . . Alsatian," Tom said, his eyes catching light for a second.

"Lord, man, why don't you get a woman?" Sam exclaimed. Roars of laughter, sniggers, digging-in of elbows.

"Got to catch bus," he said, as soon as they might hear.

"Here, you can't go yet. Why, you haven't eaten a thing!" Yvonne was purring into his ear. She leaned over, feeding him forcibly with sausage roll.

The joke flared up again. "Go on, get yourself a woman, Tom. Wouldn't matter about her pedigree, I reckon, so long as her points was right, eh, mates?" Somehow even then they quieted down sooner because of the big, silent man sitting there with queer, unmoved dignity.

"Come on, man, drink up. 'Tis your party, you know."

"Catch bus," Tom was understood to say.

"Can't go till we've had a bit of a sing-song."

"Here, can't someone think of a monkey song for old Tom?" Fleming shouted, "I can think of one."

"I bet you can. None of that now, Sam. Ladies present."

"Bus," said Tom, trying to get up.

"You can't go yet, Tom; haven't said good-bye."

"Come on, boys and girls, raise your glasses. I give you—Tom, the best animal man I ever had," cried Fleming.

Shouts of "Tom, Tom," and clinking of glasses.

Then it was all over. Someone put on a jazz record to cover the anticlimax of handshakes, then at last he was outside, crossing the ground, alone. No time to see the chimps again. He went straight to Sam's van to collect his bag, found it in a corner, and turned to grope his way out in the half light.

Three minutes to catch the last bus; he could just do it, running. But someone was in the doorway, barring it with outstretched arms.

"Tom!" Yvonne was panting. "Tom, is that you?"

"Yes, got to run, catch bus."

She held the doorposts so that he could not move without pushing past her. "Tom, take me with you," she said urgently.

"Going away. Now."

"I know you're going away. Don't you see I want to come

with you? Oh, you don't know how I want to get away from all this. I'd, I'd be. . . good to you, Tom; really I would. Take me, Tom, please, please. I'll do anything you say."

And now she was not in the doorway any more, was close, warm against him, her arms reaching up round his neck. A woman, soft and throbbing against his heart. He couldn't think at all. " No, girl, I can't."

" I'd be good to you, Tom, I promise. I wouldn't get in your way. I'd cook meals and keep things nice. I'd wash and clean—"

" Yvonne, you hardly spoke—before," Tom said, bewildered.

" I know, I've been a fool. But I'll make up for that, make up for everything you've never had, Tom. Only take me away from here, and all the chaps that follow me around, away from this life. Never staying in one place. Oh, you don't know how much I want to get away and just stay put somewhere, and think about cooking the supper, and washing up, like other women. Can't even you understand? Please, Tom."

" Got to run—for bus."

Tom stood there powerless, a great oak twined with ivy.

" To hell with your bus. Here I am giving myself to you, and all you can think of is your damned bus! " she screamed at him, beating his shoulders with clenched fists. " Take me. I've got money, a bit, if that's what you're thinking about. You can have it all."

Then, as he still seemed to take no notice, she quietened. " You'll be lonely, Tom," she whispered, wheedling. " Lonely, out there by the sea, all on your own. You don't know what it'll be like, not having the circus round you, not even the chimps."

" No."

" Just think, now, of coming home to nice hot meals and a light in the window instead of all cold and empty."

" Want a bit of peace," he muttered.

" Would you think it over and maybe come back for me? Dad would give us the chimps for a wedding present if I really . . ."

" No."

She drew away from him and drooped against the doorway. " Go on then, go and catch your blasted bus."

" Gone." It was all ruined, his dream of finding his little home out there by the twilight sea.

" It's gone," he repeated miserably, the picture smashed that he could never repaint.

" I'm sorry," she said softly, something of his despair penetrating her own. " Look, I'll drive you out. It's not far, is it? "

" No, no. I can doss down with Sam," he said dully.

"Please let me. After all, it's my fault the bus has gone, it's the least I can do to try and make up. And—and perhaps you might not think me quite such a bitch. How far?"

"Twelve miles."

Desire for the dream struggled with his denial. If she drove him, she would know where to come again. But to be there tonight, after all . . .

"Twelve miles—that's nothing. I'll enjoy getting away from this place for an hour. Wait while I get a coat. Pick you up at the gate." She was gone before he could speak again. He felt the warmth of his coat where her head had lain.

He had to wait a long time, but it did not matter now. The van would wait. It would be stuffy—warm inside from the day's sunshine; slowly, as he turned up the wick of the oil lamp, it would all come into view, the painted mahogany sideboard, the coke stove for winter, two bunks with red blankets, three brass-handled cupboards.

When the car came at last he saw why she had been so long. The chimps were in the back, gibbering with excitement. She shouldn't have brought them, he thought. It would be draughty. Victoria caught chills very easily.

For a moment he looked back. The ground was aglow with the bright squares of van windows. A smell of stew drifted from the Fleming trailer. Radios clamoured above the jungle sounds of a lion's cough, a great foot thudding, then they were away.

Yvonne did not speak for a long time. Dressed in an ordinary camel coat, and intent on driving through the town's traffic, she did not seem the same creature who had alternately kissed and abused him half an hour before. Now at last they were on the way.

Tom stared ahead into the darkness of the future, happiness welling up in his heart. When he'd been a kid in the church choir they'd sung an Easter anthem, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," and ever after, in moments of happiness, it sang round inside his head: "Lift up your gates and sing!" The engine of the car purred Cuckoo Field, Cuckoo Field. Hedges fled past. He had forgotten Yvonne until she spoke.

"Look, Tom, I'm sorry I flew out at you like that. It's just I get so fed up with things I could scream—die—tear things up—throw plates. Count your lucky stars you're getting out, that's all. I'd give anything to be in your place."

"Thought you liked circus," he said, plucking his thoughts back like kites.

"When I was a kid I did; then it was all fun and glitter, and

I adored it. Daddy's little darling, and everyone applauding. Now I've had ten years of it and I'm getting old."

"Old?"

"Old for the ring. Twenty-seven, if you want to know. Too old for my sort of game. Chaps want some kid in her teens, really. They'll stop coming for an eyeful soon, and I shall get slack and stringy, and end up an old hag selling tickets. Oh, I didn't mean to go on at you again, only I have to talk to someone."

The car seemed to shoot through the night on the power of her hatred. Let her talk. Let her husky voice tear up the darkness, he need not listen. Soon he would be where there was no voice but that of the sea, he thought. But that was no use, the car was possessed of her passion and he was forced to be aware of this pulsing life beside him, this Yvonne with hands clenched white on the wheel and dark curls whipping his cheek in the rush of air.

"Talk if you want to," he said, as he might to Victoria.

"Your getting away made me desperate all of a sudden. I didn't think there was anybody in the damned show who felt trapped like me, and then suddenly I find you're going, have worked it all out, planned it. So you do understand, don't you, what I'm trying to say? No one else can. They all think I'm just a cheap flirt. Nobody ever marries a girl like me—or what they think is me."

She braked sharply to avoid a rabbit, and went on, "I'm not a bad girl, Tom. Nobody ever thinks I want to know ordinary things, like the best cuts of bacon, and which joints to choose, but I do," she finished quietly.

He had drifted away from her again into the night, for out there, east and west, great hills had risen black against the sky's first stars, hills long as whale-backs sliding to a hidden sea.

"Why are you going to this particular place, anyway?"

"A year ago I saw it, wanted it," he said dreamily.

"And did you decide then, a year ago?"

"Yes, had to save—buy out my van."

"But what will you do?"

"Work on the farm. All settled."

The road was dark now with overhanging trees. Victoria was asleep, one long arm about his neck. The road shone with dampness under the headlights.

Yvonne was driving too fast, foot hard down, curls blown back, and a queer exalted look.

Then, as the pale bole of a mighty beech loomed straight ahead at a sharp bend, she turned to him and said, very quietly, "Either you promise to take me with you, or I'll drive straight into that tree. I mean it."

He knew she did. The trees whipped by faster and faster. She had meant to do this, then. That was why she had brought the chimps, knowing he loved them most.

Victoria, flying glass, twisted metal, Cuckoo Field, all blurred across his mind in that moment. Then he said, "*No.*"

The car shot forward. The great tree leapt to meet them.

In one convulsive movement he had pushed Victoria away, thrown himself at the steering-wheel, and kicked Yvonne's foot from the accelerator. The car slewed off a bank below the tree, careered wildly across the road into the opposite hedge, and skidded round on two wheels in a screeching tear.

He hung on, fighting for control. It was like grappling with a leaping, wild animal, but at last he had it under control, tamed. Finally they slowed, drew up, in a reek of burnt rubber.

During the fierce crescendo of excitement he had not known fear. Now he was trembling. Moreover the air all about him was full of weeping. Yvonne was huddled against the door, sobbing into her hands under a curtain of dark hair, Victoria cowered on the floor whimpering; Albert chattered with rage.

Tom grinned to himself and lit a cigarette. He had saved the dream. Gently he pushed Yvonne across and took the driving seat. Quite soon they reached the narrow lane entrance where the car could go no farther.

As his eyes widened to the twilight, pale things rose up glimmering all about him, lacy flowers, a flint stone, and blundering moths. Past the farm smells there were others; parsley, bittersweetness, warm scents, grass.

And now here was the last gate.

He stood a moment, fumbled with the chain, unlatched it, was at last there, in Cuckoo Field, field of dreams, home.

It was just as he remembered it a year ago: a huge, bare field sloping darkly upwards to the cliff-edged sky that was lit with the strange sea-gleam. Just as he remembered, only up in the corner was a small, dark shape, his van.

A startled hare crouched low in the dew-wet tussocks of cliff grass, then slowly lifted its head at this strange sight.

Dark against the summer sky strode a giant of a man, singing, with a woman in his arms and two monkeys following. For what violence could never have done, a few tears had accomplished, and Tom had decided that Cuckoo Field was big enough for four.

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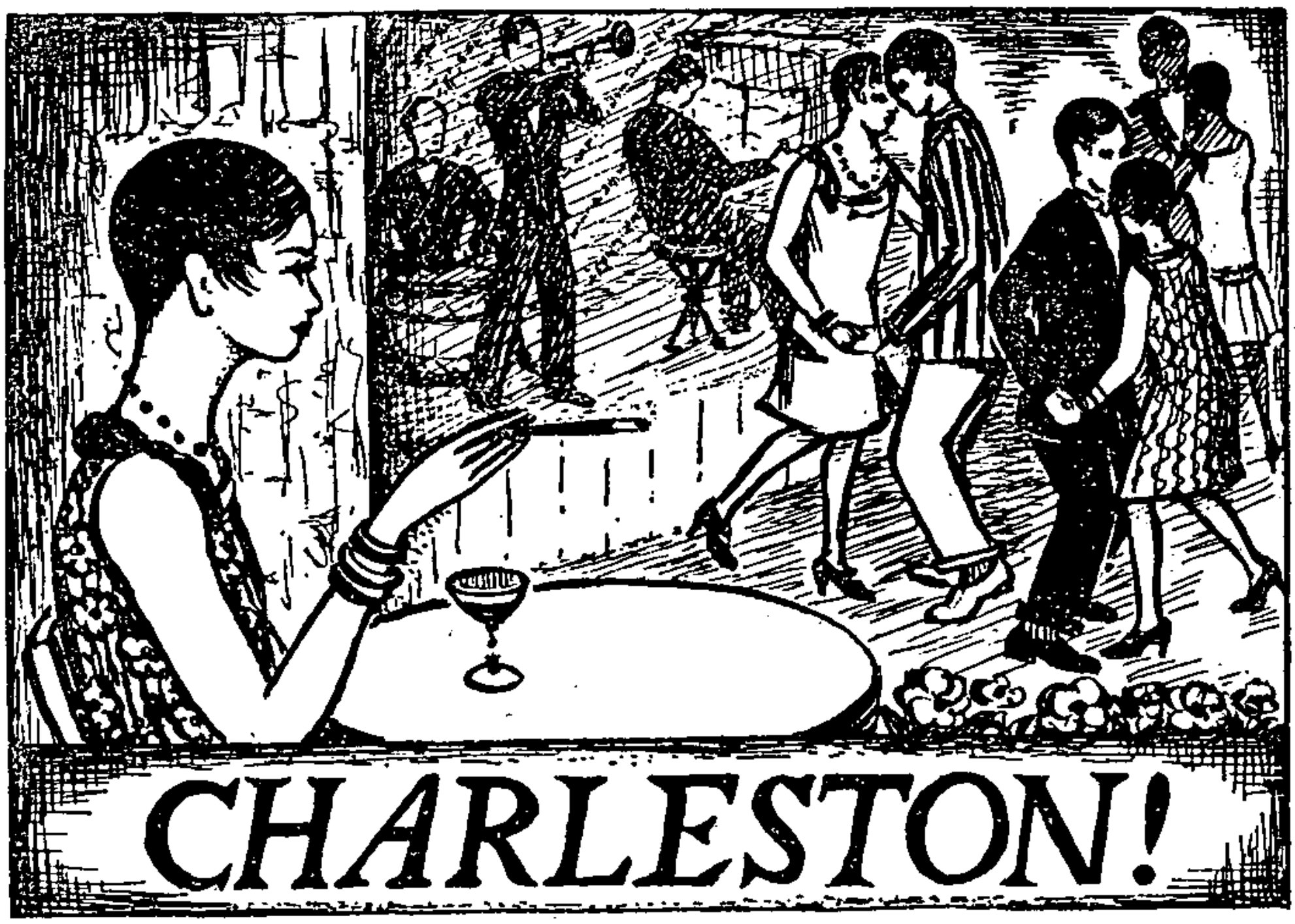
★ ★ ★

***When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?***




**Everybody's doin' it, doin' it, doin' it**

*"Me an' ma baby's*
*Got two mo' ways,*
*Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!*
*Da, da,*
*Da, da, da!*
*Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"*

*Soft light on the tables,*
*Music gay,*
*Brown-skin steppers*
*In a cabaret.*

LANGSTON HUGHES

## *Bishop's Move*

In London the mysteries of the Charleston were introduced in July 1925 to some fifty or sixty prominent ballroom teachers at a special Tea Dance arranged by the *Dancing Times* at the Carnival Club . . . It was demonstrated, in evening dress, by Miss Annette Mills and Mr. Robert Sielle, who danced to a three-piece orchestra and posed for photographs, giving a preview of the new craze which had captured America and was soon to sweep England.

At first the dance was condemned as "vulgar," but it gained distinction when the Prince of Wales danced it. The Vicar of

St. Aidan's, Bristol, attacked it violently: "Any lover of the beautiful will die rather than be associated with the Charleston. *It is neurotic! It is rotten! It Stinks! Phew, open the windows!*" But the Bishop of Coventry liked it. "It is a very nice dance," he announced.

JOHN MONTGOMERY, *The Twenties*

*Lost my partner, what'll I do?*
*Skip to my Lou, my darling.*
*I'll get another one prettier than you,*
*Skip to my Lou, my darling.*

*Skip to my Lou*

## *Gay Dog*

I met him at Ruth's wedding, a tall boy with a thin face, who looked like a startled bird. When I saw him first, he was dancing the Charleston with Ruth's Afghan hound. Someone told me he was professor of economics at some university. I laughed disbelievingly, but it turned out to be true, or rather, it had been true a fortnight before. He had lost his job, he told me over the champagne; he was Polish and Irish, would I dance with him? I was a better dancer than the dog, he allowed.

EVELYN EATON, *Every Month Was May*

## *Steppin' Out*

*Soft light on the tables,*
*Music gay,*
*Brown-skin steppers*
*In a cabaret.*

*"Me an' ma baby's*
*Got two mo' ways,*
*Two mo' ways to do de Charleston!"*

LANGSTON HUGHES, *Negro Dancers*

# THE ACHILLES AFFAIR

A FLAT, sandy plain south of Mersah Matruh. A sand-bagged rifle range with the firing points from two to six hundred marked out with ration boxes. A file of Guardsmen rising from the prone position, snapping open bolts for the drill-Sergeant's inspection—and Corporal Peter Feltham has another possible. Snap at five hundred—and the drill-Sergeant tells him not to allow it to go to 'is bloody 'ead—and the Captain calls him over to the fifteen-hundredweight.

The Captain is tall—nearly six feet—very lean, Nordic in colouring but now burnt almost black. He asks me where I learnt to shoot and seems surprised when I tell him at the depot in Caterham—that is, if one doesn't count wild-fowling on the Essex flats with the old man. Regular soldier? No. What was I doing before the war? Languages at Cambridge. Thought of a commission? God forbid—and that calls for a cold stare that doesn't need the added injunction not to be impertinent.

★ **Brilliant first novel**

# By BERKELY MATHER

Can I drive a fifteen-hundredweight? Yes. Would I like to go on a few days' recce? Yes, again. A few more general questions, the answers to which he seems to know in advance, and I salute and fall out.

We left next morning before the sun had climbed over the dunes and, dust-masked and goggled, we drove along the coast road against the opposite, western-moving traffic that stretched unbroken to Alamein. We were very much Guards Officer and Other Rank and spoke little, although he did his share of the driving and maintenance chores, quickly, neatly, and with the economy of effort that marked all his movements.

I wondered where the recce would begin and whether, since we were moving steadily eastwards, this meant another retreat. Several times while he was driving, he passed the map across to me and told me to fix our position. Since the road was milestoned and signposted rather better than the A1 at home, I realised he was merely testing my map-reading.

Alamein. We skirt Alex, miss Cairo altogether, and bivouac

that night near the Canal beside the Moascar road. He did first, and longest, sentry-go while I rolled in a blanket in the sand. He slept for no more than two hours just before dawn and then woke, shaved, and washed in a canvas bucket while I heated m.-and-v. and brewed up over a petrol-and-sand fire. I carried my plate and mug the few yards away that Guards' propriety demanded, but he called me back and, while we ate, told me a little of our future movements.

"I'm going to drop you at Fayid, on the shores of the Bitter Lakes. You'll come under the orders of Sergeant Finnessy—Royal Canadians. There are a few things you must learn, Feltham, before you come out with me. You may not learn them—in which case I shall return you to the Battalion. If you do, I shall tell you what the next move is and give you the opportunity of withdrawing if it doesn't appeal to you."

It was the first time that anybody had ever hinted that I had an option in anything in the Army, and I marvelled greatly.

He dumped me at a small attached details camp that afternoon and drove off into the dusk. Finnessy collected me the following morning. He was a short, stocky man, built like a fifteen-hundred-weight truck.

I tried to worm something of the future out of him, but it got me nowhere. He merely took me to a mud-hut village about twelve kilometres down the Treaty Road on the Suez side, and handed me over to a mulatto who wore a mixture of British and Australian battledress and talked with an American accent.

"Tony, here, will take care of your weapon training," Finnessy told me. I told him that I'd passed out on weapon training, and he said, "Yeah? Well, maybe you'll pass out a few more times under Tony. He's a bastard."

He was. The third day he had me on drawing and firing while simultaneously dropping flat to the ground. I wasn't going down fast enough so he kicked my legs from underneath me. I had had enough. I swung at him. He laughed and kicked me neatly in the crutch. I did the next period—tommy-gun from the hip—standing on one leg and whimpering. At the end of it all he kicked my remaining leg from under me and rabbit-punched me as I fell.

I crawled back to the billet an hour later. He and Finnessy were playing murderous stud poker. Finnessy gave me a beer, and even Tony was quite sympathetic out of office hours. He showed me how to counter both the kick and the punch. He was good, was Tony. The American accent was phoney—he had never been west of Alexandria and was, in fact, managing a brothel in Aleppo when the Firm recruited him as professor-emeritus of the pistol, the sub-machine gun, and the wire loop. He rather fancied himself with both the long and short knife, but there Finnessy had it over him hands down.

Finnessy, a tough, ageless forty-five, had skippered American fore-and-afters on the Pacific coast, lumberjacked in Canada, bounced in Bowery bars, run a beer truck in Chicago during the

latter days of prohibition, sponsored revolutions in some of the smaller banana republics south of Panama, and had deserted from a Foreign Legion penal battalion after killing a Senegalese sergeant whose only words of English were, unfortunately, " son-of-a-bitch."

" How was I to know the guy was just being affectionate? " he asked complainingly when telling me some time later. " Anyhow, it all turned out all right. I took it on the lam then and got across to Gibraltar in a Tunisian fishing-boat just as the war broke out. I was screened, rescreened, and bulldozed around for months until a guy saw me clip a redcap corporal one morning and recruited me for this outfit, via the Royal Canucks."

" And what is this outfit? " I asked him.

" Finish your chow, bud," he told me. " Next period unarmed combat."

I did five weeks in that hell-hole before going out into the desert for parachute jumps. It was all rather new then, and it scared the living hell out of me. Six day jumps and two by night—and then find your own way back over distances up to twenty miles across the desert by compass and rough astro fix. I didn't like any of it—but sometimes I look back with regret on the sense of sheer physical fitness I enjoyed at the end of it.

The Captain was there the day I returned from the jump school. He was sitting at a table in one of the mud huts, writing. I clicked my heels at the door, saluted, and waited. He motioned me in with a curt nod and pointed to a camp chair. I sat on the edge of it while he went on writing. After about ten minutes he looked up. I got up smartly. He frowned, and said in perfect but rather nasal Berlin German, " Sit down, and stop this damned stamping and crashing around."

I said, " Jawohl, Herr Hauptmann," and sat down.

He went on then, still in German, " You've done rather well, I gather, but you must learn not to ask Finnessy, Tony, or anybody else you meet in the course of your duties, questions concerning this group. That which you need to know you'll be told. Understand? "

" I understand, Herr Hauptmann."

" A lot of the stuff you have learnt I trust you'll never be called upon to use but, now you've seen the seamy side of it, do you want to join us? "

A pig in a poke but I murmured, " Jawohl," again, and then he asked me to tell him about the jumping course. Halfway through my recitation he whipped in a question in Serbo-Croat, then in modern Greek, and then in Turkish. He lost me there, although both my German and Greek were better than his, albeit more academic. He tried French then, and I was happier. Finally, he switched back to English.

" Not bad—not bad at all," he said. " It was fortunate that our revered Company Commander didn't know his job or you'd have been reported to the " I " boys, and would have by now been

sitting in a Cipher Office in Cairo with two G.S. stars on your shoulder." He pushed a box of cigarettes across the table, and I knew that I had broken with the Guards.

I said, "Thank you, sir," and took one.

"Drop the sir, if you please. My name is Andreas from now on—yours is Stavro. Go off and eat, and then get some sleep. We are due at the airfield at three in the morning."

I had enough savvy not even to look curious—not even when Tony came in later with black, baggy breeches called 'bragas,' the high, rawhide boots, rough shirt, and smelly, sheepskin jacket of the Balkan peasant, and showed me how to put them on, finally hitching up the voluminous pants with an untidy, red sash that threatened to let the lot down with a run at any minute.

"You want to shuffle them boots along, flat-soled, bud, and kinda bent-legged," he told me. He was right.

Tony woke me from a sound sleep in the small, raw hours, dumping a hurricane lamp, a mug of coffee, and a plate of tepid bacon and eggs on the table. He was the Firm cook as well as its teacher of mayhem. His mayhem was better than his cooking.

"Get your duds on, bud, and hand over your watch, wallet, that fancy ring you wear, and everything else personal, less'n what the good Lawd issued you with," he directed. Then, as I moved towards the washstand, "You don't wash nor shave till you git back. This is biz, bud. Put this little bag of garlic round your neck. Good for rheumatics, the bugs don't like it, and it'll make you stink like an Armenian carpet-seller."

Andreas was waiting in the covered fifteen-hundredweight when I went out. Finnessy was driving and whatever papers he was carrying took us right through both check-points at the airstrip—up to the Dakota that stood, hump-backed and massive, on the dark tarmac. We took off almost immediately, sitting hunched amid airdrop containers and gunny-wrapped bundles. Andreas was dressed much the same as I, and I wondered if he smelt as badly. The cumulative effect of both of us must have been terrific, because I heard the three R.A.S.C. privates who formed the dropping crew comparing mucking wogs with mucking badgers, with a preference for the latter.

We talked in Greek. He told me that we were bound for Nicosia in the first instance. He had to see someone there. We would refuel, wait almost till sunset, and then there would be a long run up the Dalmatian coast, a quick jink inland and, finally, a drop about midnight, together with the supplies, into the territory of a Partisan leader known as Cathos. At least that was the programme if the signs and portents were favourable. If not, it would mean a turn-round and another long wait at Nicosia until they were.

In the event, things turned out just as they should. The fires were where they should have been. The signal was given at the right moment. I remember that first one, "H.T."—four dots, a pause and then a dash — and the green light went up over the open, side door. The three privates worked like galley slaves kicking

out the bundles as we circled round over the dropping zone, and the plane emptied like magic. Then the four of them helped us into our harness and hooked us up. The navigator, an Australian flight-sergeant, said, " O.K., Johnny, jig-a-jig-a-jig tray bong," and out we went, Andreas leading.

I never quite got over the empty feeling of utter aloneness one always had after the chute had blossomed and one swung slowly downwards and watched the twin, cherry-red exhaust flashes getting smaller. It quite overrode the feeling of relief one felt that the damned thing *had* opened, or the inevitable wind-up over what lay below in the dark. Church steeples and high-tension wires were, illogically enough, always my main worry, even in the Balkans.

We hit the deck together about thirty yards apart. Mine was a duff landing, and I was dragged through low scrub downhill before I had the wit to hit my release box and roll. I fetched up against a container that felt like the breechblock of a twenty-five pounder, and I lay and tried to get my breath back and my heart down from behind my tonsils, and listened to a babble of voices above me.

They were yelling greetings in a dialect of Serbo-Croat of which I understood only about one word in three, but Andreas seemed to be coping quite adequately with it. He was thumping backs and returning bear-like hugs when I struggled up the hill to them and, on his introduction, they included me in the welcome. If there was a Nazi patrol within ten miles these lads couldn't seem to have cared less. That was the thing that worried me most about these missions—after the actual jump I mean—this awful babble of voices, the neglect to douse the signal fires, the shouts of the muleteers as they loaded and drove off, the complete disregard for anything remotely resembling security. I found myself shouting in English, " Shut up, you noisy lot of bastards! " It was taken as a greeting and only served to make them yell the louder. Andreas dug me hard in the ribs then, and after a while we set off in a chattering procession for a village farther down the slope.

The clear-cut memory of this first trip fades now into a kaleidoscope of many others. We feasted long on sheep, olives, the worst-smelling but most delicious cheese I have ever tasted, sour cream, melons, and grapes, topped it off with a litre of the rough local wine, and then slept like logs in sheepskin robes in a hidden cave about a mile from the village.

In the morning Andreas had a long discussion over the disposal of the supplies with the reception committee and representatives of other villages in the neighbourhood. This, apparently, was the trickiest part of the mission.

It was all sorted out eventually, and then we set out on mules for the coast. We were picked up by the Navy the following night —bang on the spot, and at the prearranged time. A two-day run by submarine back to Cyprus, plane to Fayid, and that was it.

I felt like the Scarlet Pimpernel—until Andreas catalogued the

things I had done badly. Quite kindly, of course, but very, very firmly. Losing my temper—breaking into English—using my left hand to eat with in a Moslem community—refraining to belch at the end of the meal and, cardinal sin, looking at a woman and thanking her as she bent over my shoulder to serve me with more food—all tips he had given me on the way out.

I was learning fast, though. We did six or seven trips within the next three months—just routine supply and arms drops to the Partisans—all relatively uneventful. And between whiles I finished my radio and demolitions courses. Andreas considered I needed just one more before I was ready to work on my own. That was, of course, the one on which things went all to hell.

There was no apparent reason why this trip shouldn't have passed off as uneventfully as any of the others. If anything, it was an easier one. We had no supplies or arms to complicate matters. We were merely going in to arrange a drop to a new man.

There were two major bands working in the hills at this time. They differed widely in their domestic politics but were united in their hatred of the Boche. Cathos commanded the bigger and the more reliable of the two, while a young intellectual called Milo ran the other. Provided both were kept well supplied and Andreas or one of the other agents was present at the division of spoils, they rubbed along fairly happily and could on occasion even be persuaded to co-operate with each other in a combined action.

But now a third was moving into the firmament—a Greek who called himself by the code-name of Achilles. He was well-trained—regimentally and Staff—having held a commission in the prewar Greek Army. He commanded a large following and was reasonably well organised. His politics, however, were suspect by both the other groups, Cathos going so far as to accuse him of past underground collaboration with the Nazis. This trip was therefore in the nature of a minor diplomatic mission. If Andreas was satisfied, our people were prepared to make a small token drop to Achilles to see how he used the stuff.

We landed in the proper parish, and I was surprised and relieved at our business-like reception. It was all done in silence, the correct signals were given and returned, and passwords and countersigns exchanged.

My heart warmed to Achilles. He was a dark, saturnine man, with a heavy, black moustache. He didn't receive us himself but sent his lieutenant. His demands, when we met him next morning, were not excessive, but he knew just what he wanted and he drove a hard bargain. Three-inch mortars, medium machine guns and the new Sten were his main requirement. He wanted them quickly, and he wanted skilled instruction in their use.

We were in direct wireless touch with Cairo by this time on the VHF set that had become the bane of my existence because I had to hump it. Achilles wanted Andreas to wireless through his requirements and then to await their arrival and take over the instruction.

On the face of it, it seemed an eminently sensible suggestion which would save an extra trip, but Andreas was dead against it. He was not certain of wireless security, he said. This, even I knew, was nonsense. It would have taken the Boche a month to get a reliable fix on our transmitter, and the code we were using was as near to uncrackable as any code can be. Words got heated in the end, but Andreas carried his point. We would return to Cairo to arrange things.

The next morning we set out on foot for our rendezvous with the Navy. He told me, as we walked down the path, that he just wasn't satisfied. Why? He shrugged. Instinct, perhaps.

We saw the Nazi patrol perhaps three minutes before they saw us—just long enough for me to drop the set over the edge of the mountain path into a clump of she-oak. Without that damning bit of evidence we had a Chinaman's chance, as we had nothing else on us that law-abiding shepherds on their way to the Splitz market shouldn't have—except pistols, and they were carried inside the wireless set so that all could be dumped in just such an emergency as this.

On one side of the path, the cliff dropped sheerly a good two hundred feet to the mountain torrent below; on the other, it rose like a wall. If we had turned tail and run for it, they could have raked us with their Schmeissers before we had gone ten yards.

They came steadily on up the slope towards us—twelve of them, headed by a Feldwebel with a mule carrying their heavier kit. S.S., but rather second water. Germany was beginning to feel the pinch by now. The Eastern Front was showing cracks. Monty was getting into his stride in North Africa and the Second Front was a matter of time. These chaps were past their prime and they puffed as they climbed, belts unbuckled and tunics loosened. That wouldn't have affected their Schmeissers, though.

We had a drill for this—a drill that Andreas had taken me through over and over again until I could have repeated it in my sleep. My scalp crawled, nevertheless.

The gap closed until the Feldwebel had reached us. Bobbing and bowing with just the right degree of frightened sycophancy, we drew aside to let them pass.

The Feldwebel halted and barked at us in the local dialect, "Who are you? Where are you from? Where do you go?"

We quavered the well-nigh unpronounceable names on our near-perfect papers, told him the name of a village fourteen miles back along the track by which we had come, and finished with the information that we were going into Splitz to buy a couple of ewes. He looked at our papers and asked us in German the name of the headman of the village and whether we were married. I almost answered and then broke into a cold sweat. Andreas goggled at him uncomprehendingly and shook his head.

"The Herr Feldwebel might try them in English," sniggered the Corporal, and the Herr Feldwebel suggested that the Herr

Corporal might shut his thundering and lightning, pig-damned mouth. He did, however, turn back to us and say, "'Ow you do? Piccadilly," and basked in the admiring glances of his squad.

Even I, tiro at the game as I was, could see the meaning of this. It told us plainly that they were looking for two Croats who were reputed to speak both German and English. We shook our heads and looked dumb.

The Feldwebel turned back to the Corporal. "Search them," he ordered.

They stripped us to the buff, muttering the while that none but Croats could stink like us.

"Give them a ten-yard start and two short bursts," suggested the Corporal, and watched closely to see the effect of it on us. I had got a grip on myself by this time, however, while Andreas had never lost his.

They told us to get dressed again, and then pointed back up the track the way we had come and told us to get going. We broke out into voluble but respectful protest. We were poor shepherds—we were going to Splitz— Two practised jackboots up our respective behinds put a stop to that, and we stumbled miserably along ahead of them.

At the top of the cliff the path forked—one going back to Achilles' hideout—the other dipping down into the valley and leading eventually to Pengz, a market town some thirty miles to the north which was, we knew, the headquarters of the Feldgendarmerie to which was attached a small, Gestapo interrogation section. We took the Pengz road. The prospect stank.

We marched for over five hours until the Boche were about all in and even we, fit as mountain goats, were feeling it. Then we came to a village. It was just a huddle of whitewashed cottages on the side of a hill, with a tiny Orthodox church and an even smaller mosque perched above it. There weren't many people about as we filed down the narrow street, and the few we did see withdrew quickly behind closed doors. We went right through to the small market square. There were houses on three sides and a sheer drop into the gorge below on the fourth. We halted at the gendarmerie, and they shoved us into the single lock-up.

There was a tiny, barred window high in the wall and we took it in turns to stand on the up-ended bed-boards to look out into the square. Eleven of the Boche hobbled off to a shuttered house on the opposite side and hammered on the door with their butts until an old and frightened man opened up. It was the local wineshop.

They sat on the low wall outside and drank wine out of skins; then they took off their boots, looked at their feet, and moaned softly. The twelfth Hun, who should have been doing sentry over us, sneaked across and joined in the persuasion the others were bringing on the Feldwebel not to go any farther that night. He didn't need much persuasion.

After a while they unloaded the mule and started a gargantuan meal of wurst and black bread. They yelled for more wine, and

then the Feldwebel made himself a bed on a pile of sacks, telling the Corporal to arrange reliefs. This he did by pointing to the lock-up and giving the youngest and smallest of his command a boot up the backside towards it. This runt came halfway, looking over his shoulder at his comrades-in-arms who were giving the wine-skins a thorough going-over now that the Corporal also had got his head down. He paused, and we could almost hear his adam's apple oscillating dryly. Then he slunk back again, and I heard Andreas give a grunt of satisfaction.

It was rapidly getting dark by this time so we started to give the inside of the cell a thorough examination. The walls were of solid stone and the door was thick and heavy with the lock on the outside. It would have taken a bulldozer to make an impression on either. The roof was the weak spot. We could see the stars twinkling through the cracked tiles in one corner.

We waited an hour, the snores across the square increasing in volume every minute, then, with Andreas standing on the end of the bed-board and me clinging like a monkey to the bars to keep watch on the Boche, it took only five minutes to loosen a hole big enough for us to wriggle through.

The slope of the roof was away from the wineshop, and we landed softly on our rag-bound feet on the cobbles, safely shielded from view. They had, of course, taken our boots away when they shoved us inside, but had left them, neatly dressed by the right, outside the door where the sentry should have had his eye on them. We picked them up, and crept across the square to the side that dropped into the gorge.

A weak new moon was just appearing. I looked over the edge of the drop, and was nearly sick. Heights, with or without a chute, worry me.

Andreas didn't hesitate. He pulled on his boots, motioned me to do the same, and then swung straight over like a lizard. We went down that sheer wall from foothold to handhold with Andreas below me guiding my feet. There were times when I couldn't go another inch, when I just clung to outgrowing roots, sick with vertigo. When that happened, he came back alongside me and whispered encouragement. He *talked* me down that cliff.

We got to the bottom at last and I'd have liked to have sat with my head between my knees for a minute or so, but Andreas grabbed my elbow and urged me along at the very deuce of a clip, heading in the opposite direction to the one I would have taken, had I been in charge. We were actually going back inland instead of towards the coast. I didn't argue—in the first place I had no breath to spare and, in any case, one didn't argue with Andreas.

Lord, how my bones ached and muscles protested! We had done a good twenty-five miles since leaving Achilles' hideout. Not much for a trained soldier? Perhaps not—on the flat. Most of this had been up and down.

I must have been asleep on my feet by the time we reached the cave but I was conscious in a confused, unreal sort of way of

Andreas' hand on my elbow urging me along. Damn it! He was actually singing under his breath—a bawdy song the muleteers sing in those parts, that just matches the shuffling clop-clop of their rawhide boots.

Boots? Mine were twin containers of raw, stinging, fiery torture in which my outraged feet were squelching in a bog of worn rags, blood, and sweat. I remember swearing at him, and striking out at him futilely as he lowered me gently on to the floor of the cave, and a little later drinking some water that he had brought in his hat from the stream at the bottom of the valley. I also remember that, each time I half wakened from my coma of sheer exhaustion, he was sitting on watch in the mouth of the cave, screened from the outside by tick-thorn that he had torn up with his bare hands. The man was not human.

I took his place for most of the daylight hours, sitting hunched up in the cave mouth, and fighting the temptation to pull my boots off because I knew full well that, if I did, I would never get them on again.

Twice during the day shepherds drove their small and scrubby flocks along the valley bottom, and each time he woke and sat up, though the noise they made at that distance was all but inaudible. Once a low-flying, slow reconnaissance plane lumbered overhead, and Andreas cursed softly. This meant that we'd have to wait until nightfall before we pressed on instead of risking it later in the afternoon as we had intended. Hungry as I was, I felt greatly relieved.

We started out again just after the sun had dipped below the western hills. My feet no longer hurt—they seemed just to have atrophied. We walked and walked and walked. Never once, even after complete darkness had fallen, did he falter or appear uncertain of his objective. I slogged on behind him, his back just a slightly darker patch bobbing steadily in the gloom ahead.

I seem to have recorded little of any of our conversations during this mission. That is just how it was. He wasn't surly or stand-offish, and one could hardly describe him as taciturn, because there was a quality of lightness, almost of gaiety, about him that reached out to one even though no word was spoken. It seemed to be part of the general economy of effort he showed in everything he did, and probably accounted for the enormous reserves he could draw upon when necessary. That and one other reason.

In this business one told a subordinate as little as possible about future moves unless it was absolutely necessary—not from any lack of trust, but because in the event of capture the less one knew the less one spilt. There is a point under torture, which varies with the individual, beyond which no man can go—which is why most agents carried a little glass ampoule clipped to a back tooth. One had been offered to me but I, in my innocence, had turned it down. It seemed a backdoor sort of exit to sting oneself like a scorpion surrounded by fire.

He told me the barest minimum in those early days. Nothing

to tell me, why talk? This time I didn't even know where we were going, nor did I care except that, please God, it wasn't much farther.

He stopped at last, and I walked blindly into his back. He steadied me as I reeled, lowered me gently to the ground at the side of the track, and said, "Well done, Stavro. Rest now. I'll be back in about half an hour. I'm going forward to recce."

I remember a feeling of panic as he melted into the darkness, and then no more.

Later there were voices, and I was being half carried along the track in a swift, shambling walk. Then acrid smoke in a low hut, and somebody was cutting my boots off, and somebody else pouring scalding soup laced with brandy down my throat, and I was giggling and whimpering alternately—and then sleep. Black, merciful, all-enveloping clouds of it.

He came through the door of the hut as I woke, and leaned against the jamb, and smiled. The smile was neither ironical nor mocking—just friendly. I suppose I should have said, "Where am I?" but I didn't. I was under no illusion whatsoever. I knew I had been carried to this place. I knew, with a crushing sense of failure, that I had petered out miserably and that a jaunt of some fifty miles through the hills had found me wanting. I had finished up a beaten, whimpering wreck.

I looked at him over the edge of the sheepskin robe in which I was wrapped.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"Pretty cheap," I answered.

"Another day's rest, some solid food, and more of their balsam on your feet, and you'll be all right," he told me.

"Probably—but I've let you down. I didn't reach here on my own feet."

"What the devil does it matter whose feet you arrived on as long as you got here?"

"From what I've seen of this game you can't afford to carry passengers—not passengers who whimper and throw their hand in because they're tired."

"Want to go back to the Battalion?"

"I don't *want* to go back, but—"

"Don't let's dramatise it, then. That little jaunt called for twelve months' hard training—special training. I'm only amazed that you came out of it as well as you did. If I thought you weren't up to it I'd tell you. As it is, I advise you to eat the food they'll bring you shortly, get in another eight hours' sleep, and bite on the bullet when they fit you with another pair of boots. We've got a further forty miles to do between now and tomorrow night—only some of it by mule."

"Will the sub still be waiting?"

"Not the same one—I've whistled up another on Cathos' wireless." He grinned again then, and went. That was all. No pity, patronage, or pep-talk, but I felt I'd been accepted.

One thing I knew, though. I'd never crack again.

We left that night. My feet were a bloody pulp, but I never felt them. The sub was where it should have been and we made the rendezvous on time. Three days later we were in Fayid.

I spent the next few days scrounging round the mud huts helping Finnessy to clean, maintain, and overhaul the Firm's not inconsiderable stock-in-trade. This consisted, for the most part, of Lugers, Birettas, American .45s, tommy-guns, Schmeissers, and the new Sten. The Firm was indulgent in the matter of its minions' personal arms. You took your pick and all they asked was that you could use it. Besides arms, they stocked man-pack wireless sets, demolition kits, explosives, and anything else that the well-dressed saboteur needed. They even had a wardrobe department, and from its catholic and smelly resources one could be turned out as anything from a Trans-Jordan Bedouin to an Albanian shepherd —from a Beirut pimp to a Calabrian olive-grower.

They had a map library covering the whole of the Middle East that would have been the envy of any Divisional G.1 Ops and, finally; a safe as big as the average boxroom, stuffed with paper currency of every denomination and country in our sphere of operations.

"Real this sidé—phoney that," Finnessy told me, as he showed me the contents. "According to whether you're dealing with friends, foes, or doubtfuls."

And all this seemed to be in the charge of a polyglot Irish-American Sergeant and a Levantine ex-brothel keeper. I never saw anybody else there except queerly-dressed characters who came and went under cover of darkness, but these were presumably operatives and had no part in the running of the show. There was of course a guard there—black Mauritians—and Sapper trucks drove up to the gate and loaded and unloaded, but nobody ever came inside the wire except the queer characters aforementioned. To the outside world we were an Engineer explosive dump, which explained our isolation and touchiness about strangers and was, in fact, a perfect cover.

But who ran the place—this queer, amorphous body referred to only as the Firm? Finnessy wasn't likely to tell me, and Andreas, after dropping me on the night we arrived back, had vanished once more into the blue. After my initial snubs, I knew better than to ask any more questions. I just cleaned and oiled weapons, and waited. I waited over a week until one morning Finnessy came into the armoury and threw an envelope of papers down on the oily table. He grinned sardonically.

"You can drop the toil now, bud. You're in the big time."

"What do you mean?" I asked, wiping my hands on my denims and reaching for the envelope.

"Read it and weep."

I did. I was, it appeared, and had been for the last three days, a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Engineers.

"But, damn it all," I protested, "nobody even *asked* me if I'd take a commission."

"Nobody never asked the turkey where he'd like the axe, neither. You're elected, bud. Git some new duds offa Tony and two nice shiny pips. You're wanted up town."

"Where's that?"

"Git your duds, bud."

He was waiting by the fifteen-hundredweight when I came out, scrubbed and changed, and his salute embarrassed me more than my first kiss. I got in beside him and we drove out through the wire on to the Treaty Road.

"Return them coons' salute, you wet-eared shave-tail," he ground out of the side of his mouth as we passed the guard.

"Look, Finnessy, is this commission part of the gag or real?"

"Real, bud."

"Then stop saluting me at one moment and hazing me the next. How the hell am I going to get my bearings? I didn't ask for the bloody thing."

"Part of the treatment, bud. Keep you on the ball. Don't worry, I won't make a goof outa you in public."

"Where are you taking me now? I've got to know some time, or is that part of the treatment, too?"

"To a dive in El Akhbar Street, Cairo. When I say dive, I mean just that—dive. Sorta joint no officer and gent oughta be seen dead in."

"And what do I do there?"

"Act natural. Look just like you look now—like a sucker in a rubberneck wagon doing the sights of Chinatown for the first time and hoping for the worst."

"Must everything in this wretched organisation be done the mysterious way? Why the devil can't you say where we are going and what I'm supposed to do when I get there?"

In defiance of the printed notice on the dashboard he took a cigarette out of a battered mepracrine tin, put it in his mouth, and passed me one. He flicked a lighter under my nose, and then lit his own. One-handed, he steered the truck between a string of supercilious camels and an oncoming lorry. I sat back in the hard seat, angry and frustrated.

After a full minute, he spoke. "I'm sorry, Pete," he said, and the half-contemptuous banter had gone from his voice. "You think I'm riding you, don't you? I ain't. I've seen you kids come—and go. Sorta jigsaw puzzle. Some of you fit—some of you don't. Some get rubbed out before you know which. You Limeys have got a name for this racket. Cloak and Dagger, you call it. Lots of funny little outfits like ours—or are there? This one is tough—but tough. Who's the Big Shot of it all? I don't know. I don't want to know. I wear a sergeant's stripes and get paid as a major. For why? For doing what I'm told to do and not talking about it before or afterwards.

"Try taking it the same way. You're in now. As a corporal

you coulda quit any time you cared to say you'd had enough. That bit of brass on your shoulder, that I been taking the mike out of, means you've passed that point. Take it easy. Do as you're told. Play it as it comes." I drew on my cigarette and watched the dust devils over the dunes in front of us.

After a while he went on, "This dump I'm taking you to. The Sudrama Bar it's called. Dance floor as big as a dime, three Sudanese hopheads playing off-beat jive. Few dames there. Drinks double the price they are at Shepheard's and take the change upstairs. Out of bounds to Allied forces, but just the joint war-weary officers—young officers—make for on leave. Get me?"

I nodded.

"O.K. I drop you in Sayida Square. You go there. You buy yourself a couple of drinks. The dames will swoop like kite-hawks. You buy one or two of them a couple of drinks. You're just another military good-time Charlie. A captain will come in some time and say, 'Pete, you young bastard! What in hell are you doing here? How's Whispy keeping?' You play along with him—tell him that Whispy is a major now. You're under his orders from then on—no matter what they are. Got it?"

"I've got it," I told him wearily. "Tell Sexton I died game and give Pedro a biscuit."

"What in hell are you talking about?" he asked.

"Forget it," I told him. "We Limeys have a name for it. Cloak and Dagger, we call it."

For a moment he looked worried, then he shrugged and drove on. And in the fullness of time we arrived at Sayida Square.

The Sudrama was down a side street, just off the square. Finnessy dropped me and grinned wickedly.

"O.K., sir," he called. "Watch the redcaps. This part is out of bounds. Have a good leave." And he swung into my hand a worn air-travel bag that I hadn't seen before.

I stood and watched the truck disappear into a pother of trams, taxis, and horse-gharries. Dusk was falling and the city was stirring from the afternoon siesta. A leprous beggar plucked at my sleeve, a sibilant voice hissed promises of delights beyond the dreams of Haroun al Raschid. Two small boys with bootblack's boxes fought over my left foot.

I pushed through the crowd and wandered down the side street. There were another four cafés in its short length. All were limbering up for the night's business. Chairs were being taken in from the sidewalk, and Cairo's scanty apology for a blackout was being hung over the venetian blinds. All had bands, and their combined cacophony hit me like an open-handed blow.

The Sudrama was the second one on the right. I stood outside looking idly, and undecidedly, round. I had not to wait long. A waiter, in whose veins probably coursed proudly the combined bloodstreams of five Asian and as many African races, dropped the pile of chairs he was manhandling and shot out into the street and grabbed my arm. "This way, mister offsar, sir. Plenty cold

drink. Plenty nice girl—good band. Verree cheap, verree clean—all general come here."

I shook him off with a show of reluctance and immediately found myself being pulled four ways at once—by the representatives of the other three hostelries.

"Oh, push off—the lot of you," I yelled, and allowed myself to be pulled bodily towards The Sudrama. The bawahbi, or sort of porter-cum-bouncer, lent his weight to the tussle then, and in a minute I found myself in the comparative calm of The Sudrama.

I flopped down in a chair near the door and demanded beer, petulantly. There were not many customers at that early hour—just a couple of Levantines in close colloquy in one corner and a group of Tommies in the other. The latter looked a little apprehensive at the entrance of an officer until they noticed my solitary pip. Near the band half a dozen girls were sitting, ranging from pale café-au-lait to midnight black. All were dressed in tatty evening frocks and, as if turned on by a switch, their blank faces lit up in bright, professional greeting.

The waiter brought my beer. "You like for a young lady, sah? You want dance? You want maybe buy her a drink?"

"Beat it," I told him.

"Yes, sah. Agnes very nice young lady, sah. Very good dance—very clean. All offsahs like. Come from Manchester, sah."

"But fell in the bleedin' Black Sea on the way over," yelled one of the Tommies. "Don't have the one in green, sir. Fixed our corporal-cook good she did. Thought 'e'd been bit by a camel."

The screams of rage in Arabic, French, and Highland Light Infantry from the lady in green created a diversion for the next few moments, under cover of which one of the lighter-coloured nymphs insinuated herself into the other chair at my table and suggested champagne as a suitable foundation for later fun and games. I was becoming a little embarrassed at her forthrightness, bolstered as it was by yells of encouragement from the Tommies, when the door opened and a Captain entered. The Tommies subsided as if by magic and started to sidle towards the Hommes.

The Captain stood for a moment, swaying gently on his heels, and then he caught sight of me. He let out a delighted yell and darted across, hand outstretched.

"Pete, you young bastard! What in hell are you doing here? How's Whispy keeping?"

"Speak reverently of Whispy," I answered, "he's a bloody major now."

"Whispy, a major? Thank God we've got a Navy. Here, let's have a drink. Suffragi! Itnain whisky—kebir." He looked at my coffee-coloured charmer. "You're not going bye-byes with this, are you?"

She called him a very rude name, and he slapped her on her ample rump as she made off. It was a typical meeting between two footloose, bored young officers on leave in Cairo in 1944.

We drank our whisky and talked of imaginary mutual comrades-

in-arms, and such were his leads that I did not find it difficult to play up to him. He was a stockily-built man, a little older than I—nudging thirty, I should say. He was burnt the uniform dark tan of all of us in those parts, had crinkly, brown hair, grey eyes, and a face that was relieved of matinée-idol handsomeness by a nose that had been broken and re-set with a slight list to starboard. Like myself, he wore Sapper flashes on his khaki bush-jacket. An M.C. headed the '39 and Africa Star that were just beginning to be worn then. An engaging type. I liked him instinctively—a thing I don't do often.

He slapped his glass down on the table and looked round him, winking at the girls but waving them off when they showed signs of making a concerted rush. He glanced severely at the subdued Tommies, who were trying to look as if they weren't there, and called out, "If you types have got any sense, you'll scarper. Couldn't matter less to me, but I happen to know that El Akhbar Street is due for a going-over tonight by the A.P.M." He turned to me, "That goes for us, too. Let's beat it—I know seventeen better dumps than this. Let's get a taxi. I'll show you something of Cairo that ain't in the guidebooks." Then he called the waiter, argued over the bill, slapped down what he thought fit, and piloted me out.

In the square he hailed a prowling taxi. "Ghezira Club," he told the driver, and we dived into the frightening, blacked-out maelstrom of Cairo's night traffic. I sat back against the cushions, prepared for a longish ride. Ghezira was, I knew, the other side of the city, over the Nile.

We went only a bare two blocks, however, before he rapped on the driver's shoulder.

"Oh, to hell with The Ghezira—for an hour or two, anyhow. Let's get a drink. I know a little dump down here."

He pushed some money into the driver's outstretched palm and we got out. We stood for a moment under a darkened shop canopy and his eyes searched up the street along the way we had come. "Imsh'a'ala," he ordered the driver. When the dimmed tail-light had drawn out into the traffic, he turned, took my elbow, and hustled me round the corner into a narrow alley.

"Are we being followed?" I asked.

"Shouldn't think so for one moment," he answered. "There's a drill for this sort of thing, though. If we were really being cautious we'd take another taxi a couple of blocks across town, double on our tracks, and come back."

"Why don't we then?" I asked, "since that seems the hardest way?"

He chuckled in the darkness. "I know how you feel. It got me the same way when I started. After I'd nearly had my block knocked off and almost blew a branch office to the opposition, I realised that there was something in what I'd been taught."

We walked on in silence and I tried to get my bearings in the darkness. He seemed to sense what I was doing because he said,

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"This alley, improbably enough, is called Lotus Piazza. It's the fifth turning on the right as you go north up Zeitoon Street from Sayida Square—then it's second right, second left, first right. Try and remember that because you may have to find it yourself in the dark some time."

"And what's 'it?'"

"You'll see," he said, and I kicked myself for giving him the opening.

We had left the crowds behind us by this, and it was difficult to tell just what sort of quarter we were in. It certainly wasn't residential because not a light showed anywhere, and that wasn't due in any part to the conscientious ratepayers' blackout precautions. The high, gloomy buildings on either side seemed to be warehouses of sorts, and there was a rotten, decayed-vegetable and untanned-leather smell in the air. We made the last turning.

"Sixth door on the left," muttered my companion. "Here we are." What he did I couldn't see, but he must have made some sort of signal because a small trap in the door opened and there was an inaudible exchange of whispers.

The door opened slightly and we pushed through. A torch flashed for a split second and I saw two figures in ghalabiehs—the long, nightgown-like garment of the Egyptian peasant—each with Sten guns, and one said in burring Dorset, "You're to go right through, zir, if you please."

Guided by the Captain's hand on my elbow, we threaded our way through a maze of boxes and bales to a door in the rear wall, out into a narrow courtyard, and across to yet another door in the opposite wall. There was obviously some means of communication between the street entrance and this one, because it opened as we approached, and there was a muttered greeting from a shadowy figure behind it. I stumbled up a narrow flight of wooden stairs to a landing at the top. The Captain opened a door and stood aside to let me pass. I blinked in the sudden light.

It was a plainly—even barely—furnished office—just a desk, a couple of cabinets, maps on the wall and, in a recess to one side, a large receiver-transmitter over whose humming, oscillating valves another ghalabieh-clad figure sat crouched. The Captain led me across this room, tapped at another door and, in answer to a muffled, "Come in," opened it and ushered me through. This room was furnished as spartanly as the outer one. A large fair Lieutenant-Colonel, again a Sapper, rose as we approached his desk and held out his hand. He grinned amiably.

"Hullo, my poor, bewildered Feltham," he said. "Welcome to our Chamber of Horrors. Sit down."

I sat awkwardly on a chair, wooden, folding, flat. The Captain perched himself on the edge of the desk, reached across and helped himself to a cigarette from the Colonel's open tin, and flicked one across to me. I was past marvelling at anything, even when the Captain said plaintively, "Couldn't you have sent one of the other bods for him? I'm supposed to be on seven days' leave."

"You've had that, I'm afraid," the Colonel told him. He turned to me, and regarded me quizzically. "I suppose you're wondering what sort of madhouse you've got yourself into?"

I said, "Well—" and gave it up.

He laughed. "Damned irritating, isn't it? Still, there is an idea behind it. The less you know, the less you can spill."

"So Andreas explained to me," I blazed, "but why employ people if you think you can't trust them?"

He got up, crossed to a cabinet, rummaged through a drawer, and then came back with a bunch of photographic enlargements. He threw them on to the table in front of me. I picked up the top one, and glanced at it.

It was a photo of a man. He was naked and was standing in front of a small box-like machine. It looked like one of those "Reduce Pounds in your own Bathroom" things that one sees advertised in magazines—a sort of rough friction strap that goes round your hips and is vibrated by a small electric motor. This one seemed rather more elaborate than most in that it called for extra straps from the wrists and ankles and various other bits and pieces. It didn't register at first. I looked at him inquiringly.

"Look at it closely. I rather think you've missed the point," he said.

I held it nearer to the light—and my stomach turned right over. The "strap" was the man's large intestine.

"An ingenious device," he said dryly. "The—er—patient is kept alive and fully conscious for quite a long time by transfusions and injections of various drugs and things. Very painful. That was taken in the Gestapo interrogation centre in Grenoble. Old stuff now. Have a look at some of the others."

I tried to—but I just couldn't take it. He watched me closely. He was no longer smiling.

"How long do you think *you* could hold out against that sort of thing? Remember there are various stages leading up to it. Cyanide capsule clamped to a back tooth? That's the first thing they look for. We do issue them, of course, but only the very lucky ones get a chance to use them. Now do you see why we tell you as little as possible? What could *you* tell under what they euphemistically call 'intensive interrogation?' That you were a Guards Corporal before you were recruited. Recruited into what? An organisation referred to as the Firm. Recruited by whom? A man known only by the code-name of Andreas. Who runs the Firm? A Sergeant called Finnessy and a half-caste called Tony—oh, and a Sapper Lieutenant-Colonel called Bill who has an office in an alley off Zeitoon Street—which is changed every time an agent fails to report back. Listen, Feltham, if you stay with us—and I'm giving you the option tonight with no hard feelings if you decline—and if you are ever caught, you have my fullest permission here and now to spill all you know. You may blow part of the organisation—but only part of it, and that part of it we'll build again. But the less you know, the smaller that part will be."

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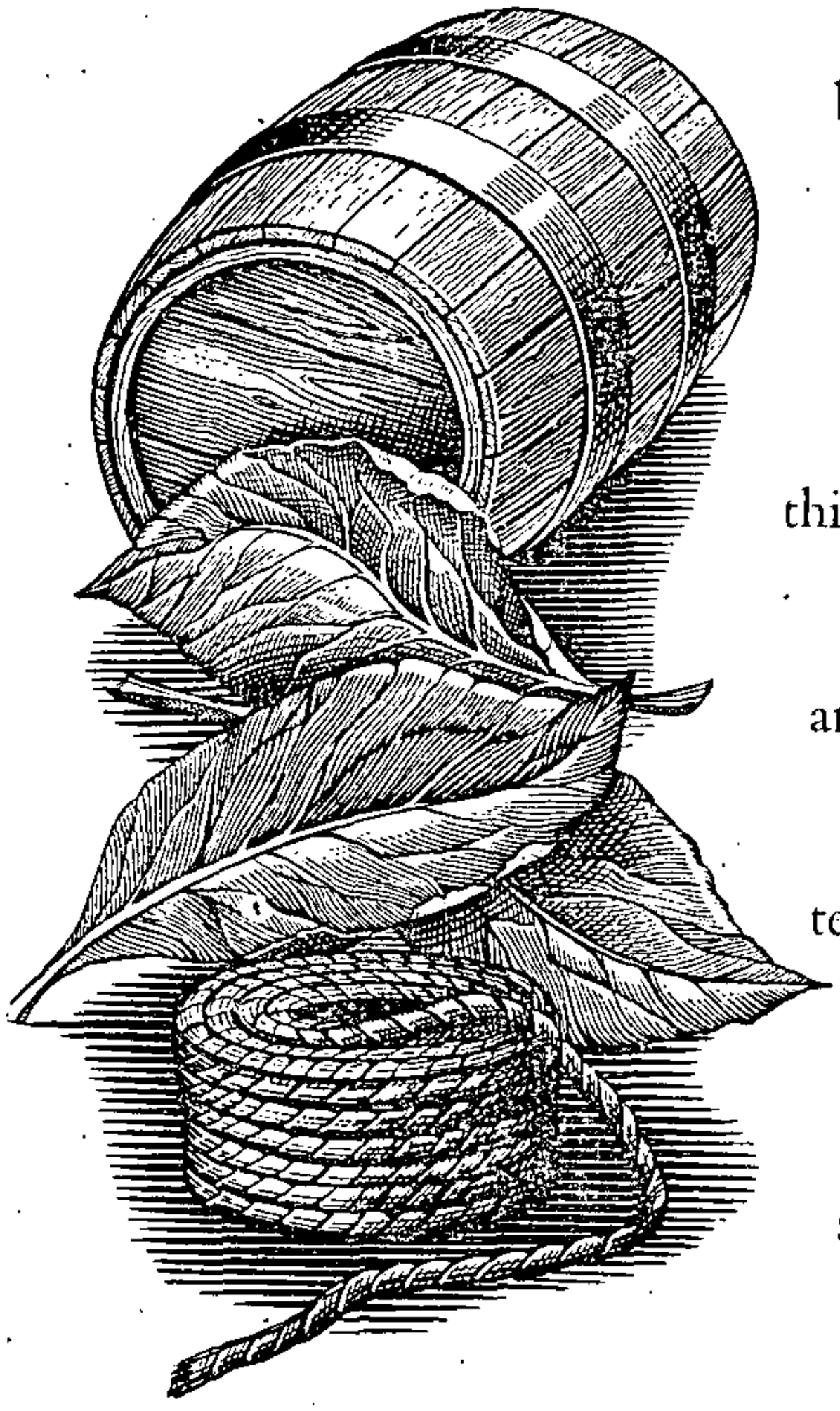

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He pushed another cigarette towards me and the Captain held a lighter to it. It took rather a time to light as I couldn't keep the damned thing still.

"Well? How do you feel about it? Still want to sit in?"

My lips started to form the word, no. I knew my limitations. I hadn't asked to come in, in the first place. I was roped in because I was a student of Balkan languages, and by some freakish co-ordination of hand and eye I could shoot rather better than average.

The Colonel nodded understandingly. "I can't say that I blame you. If I had my time over again, knowing what I know now, I'm damned if I would either. All I ask—and once you leave here I have no means of enforcing it—is that you forget all about this place, and the depot at Fayid. Your commission stands, of course, but you'll be posted to the Far East." He stood up and held out his hand. "Thank you for what you've done. Andreas gave you a very creditable report indeed."

It was that that did it. Andreas, the silent but gay, the tough but gentle. Andreas, who had all but carried me over those ghastly mountains. I thought of the queer characters who came and went through the mud huts in Fayid. Presumably they, too, had had their choice. I glanced at the photos on the table.

The Colonel followed my eye. The Captain picked up his cap and my air-travel bag. I looked at both of them in turn and did the best job at swallowing that my bone-dry throat would allow. When I spoke it was in a broken squeak.

"I'll stay, sir—if you'll have me."

There were no dramatics. The Colonel sat down again and nodded. The Captain said, "And bang goes my bloody leave."

"I'm glad of that," said the Colonel, "and very, very grateful." He paused and then went on, seeming to choose his words carefully, "You see, only you and Andreas really know this new man, Achilles."

My spirits rose. Another job with Andreas. I felt I could face most things with that completely adequate tower of strength. I spoke almost jauntily, "Oh yes. I know *that* character, all right."

"Splendid," said the Colonel dryly. "You'll be a great help. You see, we've now almost established that Achilles is a hundred-per-cent collaborator with the Boche."

"I'm not at all surprised," I said profoundly.

"A very nasty type indeed," went on the Colonel, "and unfortunately he's got Andreas."

"Got Andreas?" I gasped.

"Three days ago. I'd like you to go in and have a shot at getting him out—if he's still alive—and in any case to bump off Achilles."

Well, there it was—presented to me on a plate. I felt a constriction in my throat muscles, and a cold, clammy hand seemed to clutch the pit of my stomach. I had said I was prepared to sit in on the game, but I never bargained for this. I couldn't speak, so I just nodded dumbly.

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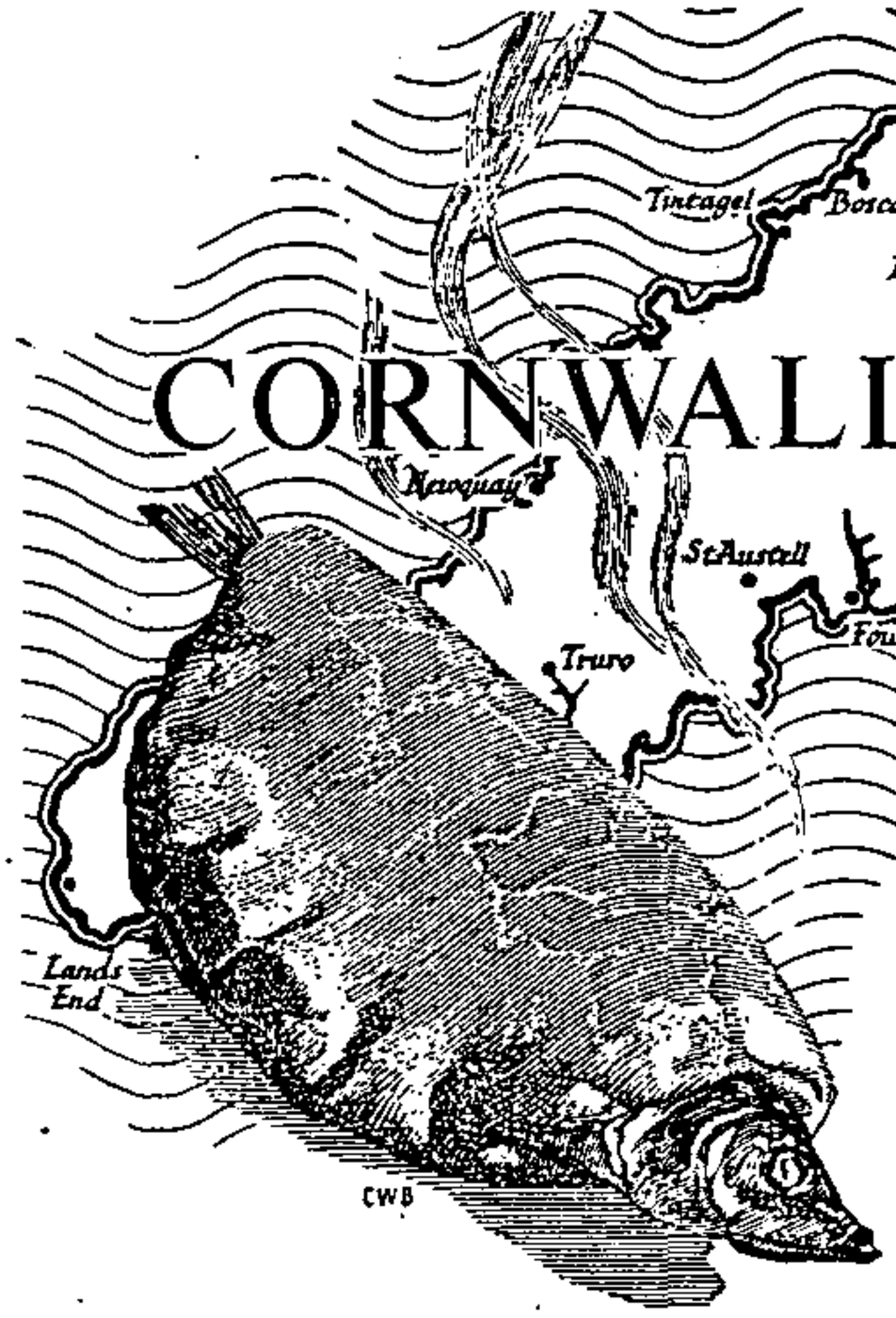


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The Colonel went on, "This is a case where you'll have to be told more than usual. More, in fact, than Andreas himself knew when he went in."

That did it.

Up till that moment I had regarded myself as the merest scullion in this kitchen of intrigue and espionage, a hewer of wood and a drawer of water, less in the picture than the Sergeant-storeman. If I was to be sent on a mission alone and, even more significant, to be told something of the background of this hitherto meaningless jigsaw, then conceivably these people saw a potential in me that I hadn't dared credit myself with. A tiny seed of self-confidence put a tentative root down through the welter of the other mixed emotions that assailed me. A very tiny seed, and a very shaky root. I'm mixing my metaphors badly, but I grasped at the root like a drowning man at a straw.

"When we first started backing these Balkan Partisans," continued the Colonel, "we didn't give a fig what their own domestic politics or affiliations might be. As long as they were anti-Hun, and were prepared to make full use of the arms and supplies we dropped to them—that was all we asked. If they saw fit to sink their differences and work together, so much the better. If, on the other hand, they insisted on going it alone—they still constituted a nuisance factor to the enemy which was, and is, valuable. See what I mean?"

I nodded again.

"Well, that is all right as far as it goes, but unfortunately some of these differences are as wide apart as Left is from Right, and now, it would appear, Achilles—his real name is Caranides, by the way—has swung so far Right that the next station along the line is nothing more or less than a form of Nazism—"

"He's a Quisling, in fact?" I suggested cleverly.

He shook his head. "Not exactly. Quisling is content to sell out completely to Hitler and to see his country another province of Germany. Achilles sees himself as a modern Alexander. He wants to build the entire Balkans into an empire with himself as Leader, Führer, Emperor, call it what you will. We wouldn't back him in that because we know that it couldn't possibly come off.

"The Hun, however, is willing to play ball—with, no doubt at all, his tongue firmly in his cheek. We believe they've made a secret deal with him. We're not completely certain, but we're more sure of it than we were three days ago when Andreas went in.

"I said just now that Achilles had got Andreas. That may not be strictly true. Andreas may be in ignorance of this latest development. Unless he's made contact with some of Chrios' people he will be in the dark, and might quite probably be arranging further drops to Achilles—"

"Surely not," I said. "Damn it all, didn't Achilles sell us out to the Huns on our last trip?"

"That is what you thought at the time—and it is probably true—but, in the meantime, we had certain news that cast doubt on that.

which is why we allowed Andreas to go back. Sorry if this all sounds muddling—"

"It does rather," I was emboldened to reply. "Do you mind if I put it all in words I can understand myself?" I started to tick off the points on my fingers. "One: Achilles, or Caranides, was vaguely under suspicion when Andreas and I saw him last. Two: our being picked up by the Hun more or less confirmed those suspicions. Three: something came to light subsequently that appeared to clear Achilles, so Andreas went in to make a further deal with him. Four: now something has transpired that once more points the finger of suspicion at Achilles, but Andreas is unaware of this latest development and may be either running into a trap or, at the worst, is in the trap already, or may even be dead. Is that it?"

"Exactly."

"All right. What do you want me to do?"

"Fly in blind in a plane that will go on and make a token supply drop in another area. You will be dropped by dead reckoning at a spot as near as we can work out to the one at which you were dropped last time. You will make your way to the last known hideout of Achilles, and try to make contact with Andreas, without the knowledge of Achilles. If you are successful you will both come out by the usual means. If Andreas has had it already, you will come out by yourself. If either or both of you can knock Achilles off, we'll pray for your long life and prosperity."

"When do I start?"

"Tomorrow. I want you to get in a good night's sleep. Tomorrow I will brief you on the drill for contacting the submarine. Any questions?"

"What is your assessment of Andreas' chances of still being alive and at liberty?"

He shrugged. "If I said anything at all, it would be the merest guesswork. I don't know."

"If I fail to make contact with Andreas, when do I call it a day and come out?"

"Leave it to you. A submarine will be at the rendezvous every second night for the next ten. If you fail to make contact with it, we'll assume you've both had it."

"Are you telling Chrios that I'm going in?"

"No. All those people talk too much. It might reach Achilles' ears. Anything more?"

"I can't think of anything at the moment—" I paused—"except that you might give me one of those glass ampoule things."

"Most definitely—I shall also give you the option, once again, of withdrawing from the whole thing."

"I shall go. I owe quite a lot to Andreas."

"Very creditable of you, but I strongly advise you to eschew anything that remotely resembles sentiment in this business. It clouds one's judgment. If, on arrival at Achilles' hideout, it appears to you that Andreas' position is hopeless, it will be your

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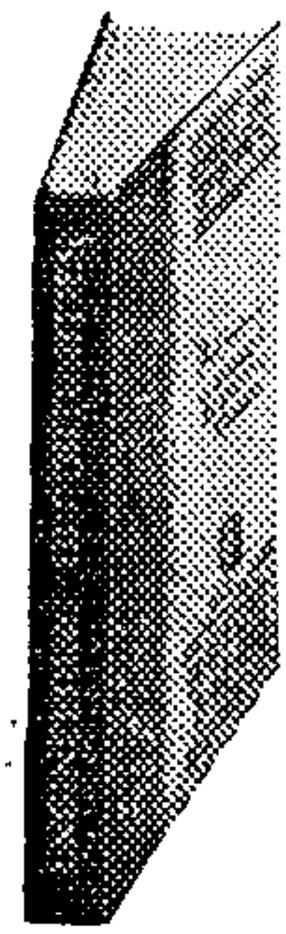

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duty to get out without putting yourself into further jeopardy. I want that clearly understood. Any further questions?"

"Nothing—except that I'd like to know who Andreas really is."

The Colonel took another cigarette and passed the tin to me. "I'm sorry to shove you back into the morass of frustration, but I will answer only those questions the answers to which will assist you. Andreas is a British agent whose name is—Andreas. That is all you need to know." He stood up and grinned. "It's hell, isn't it? Let's go and have some dinner. We do you better here than they do in Fayid."

I followed them out in silence. It seemed I would never learn.

He was perfectly right. The dinner was plain but good, although I had little appetite for it. It was served by yet another ghalabieh-clad man who said, after the *entrecôte aux champignons*, "There's no duff, sir. Will you 'ave some cheese?"

We spoke but little and I was glad when, after coffee, the Captain offered to show me my room. It was on the floor above the offices and mess, just a cubby-hole with an Army bed and a camp washstand. Somebody had unpacked the air-travel bag, and I was absurdly pleased to see my issue razor and plain wooden hairbrushes on the washstand, and my pyjamas on the pillow. They struck a comforting note of familiarity in this strange and disturbing place.

The Captain leaned against the door as I sat on the bed and unrolled my half-puttees. "My name's Claude, by the way," he said, apropos of nothing.

"Aren't you busting security or something?" I asked him bitterly.

"Lots of Claudes in the British Army. Don't let it get you down. Bill's quite right. Know just what you've got to know. We'll all introduce ourselves properly at the first annual reunion in a Holborn pub when the show's over."

"Optimist."

"You'd be surprised. Touch wood—we lose fewer than most of these funny outfits, and when we do there's less harm done. Don't worry. You'll get Andreas out all right."

"I wish I shared your confidence. I feel at the moment that I know more and more about less and less until in the end I'll finish knowing damn-all about everything."

"Which will be excellent training for the Staff if or when you decide to give this racket up. You can, you know, any time you like, in spite of anything anybody else might have told you. Suppose you just bite on that and stop making yourself angry. Good night."

That mild rebuke did me more good than anything. I got into bed and, surprisingly enough, slept like a log until somebody tapped at the door and the waiter of the night before brought me in a large china mug of tea and some shaving-water.

"Breakfast in half an hour, sir," he told me, "then you'll be wanted in the office for briefing."

Bill and Claude were waiting for me when I got there. On the

table was a set of Balkan occupation papers, complete with my photo. They were in fact a duplicate set of the ones I had had taken from me by the German patrol. It struck me as unwise, to say the least, and my face must have betrayed my opinion.

"Don't worry," Bill said. "The patrol that gathered you in last time was liquidated to a man by Chrios' chaps the following morning. Your papers and those of Andreas were recovered and destroyed. Stick 'em in your pocket—and turn out everything else you possess. Right. Here you are: money; local cigarettes and matches; handbill from the Splitz sheep sales; letter from your Uncle Feodr asking when the hell you intend paying something off the loan he made you. Cover story: read that in the car going back to Fayid, and then hand it over to Finnessy. You'll get your clothes out there, as usual—and your own gun. And now come and have a *shufti* at the map."

He led me over to a flat table and we bent over the one-inch Ordnance Survey map that was pinned down on its surface. "This track in red here is the route you took last time." Even on the map it looked a long way. "This is where you met Achilles—that is where you were dropped. This is where the patrol jumped you, and here's the route they took you along. This is the village you made your escape from—down that escarpment and along the valley, then back up here to Chrios' village. All that make sense?"

"It does."

"All right, then. This is where they will drop you this time. Long jump, I'm afraid, as they don't want to give the impression that they're putting anybody down. Unless the wind plays dirty tricks you should land on this plateau here. Bury your chute and then make your way down into this valley here.

"Follow the valley north-east until you come to the source of this stream. There's a Greek shrine there which will give you your bearings. Up over the hill here and you're on the escarpment that overlooks Achilles' valley. You're on your own then. You either succeed in making contact with Andreas or you don't.

"Whether you do or you don't, this is your way out: due west from here to the coast, fifteen miles—blacked-out lighthouse on this headland, just a squat, white tower. Here's a picture of it. Right? O.K., then. Tiny cove about a mile to the north of it. Cliff path leading down from the top—here. At the bottom, just as you come on to the beach, there's a roundish rock, about man height. Small hole on the seaward side. Scrape away the sand and you'll find a signalling torch wrapped in oiled silk.

"Three shorts and a long out to sea, repeated three times, will bring the Navy in. They'll be on watch from an hour after sundown until dawn as from next Monday—every second night for ten days. They'll challenge with, "Purley." The answer is, "Battersea." If you fail to make contact in that time, make for Chrios' village—here—and get through on the blower on his frequency. Got all that?"

"I think so."

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" If you have, you're a marvel. Go over it with Claude. Over and over again, until you can repeat it back to me word for word. Get the complete map routes photographed on to your brain. Finnessy will hear you through it all again before you emplane."

It took me over three hours before I had it to his complete satisfaction.

I left then. No handshakes. Just a curt, " Good luck, Stavro," and I followed Claude down into the courtyard.

There was a small, battered Morris Commercial here. Claude helped me into a ghalabieh which completely covered my khaki drill, and topped it with a greasy tarboosh. With my sunburnt face I looked as Egyptian as the driver—who probably came from Wigan, anyhow.

" Finnessy will be waiting with the fifteen-hundredweight at the seventeenth kilometre post the other side of Moascar. It's usually fairly deserted there. If it's not, you'll have a breakdown at the nineteenth and wait until it is. Slip off your ghalabieh and hop into the back of his truck when he honks. If you're stopped by the police, act dumb, and leave the talking to the driver." He evidently didn't come from Wigan.

The heavy, teakwood double door opened in front of us and we drove out into the lane—just another two of the humble fellahin going about our business. The driver did not speak once during the long drive except, from time to time, to curse other drivers in


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guttural, throat-clearing Arabic. I was glad of this because it gave me all the time I needed to go over and over Bill's minute instructions. If I had to repeat them once again to the sardonic Finnessy I wanted to be word-perfect, if only to avoid his derision.

He was waiting at the seventeenth kilometre, as arranged. I was vaguely disappointed as I had been relishing an imaginary interview with him for the last half hour, in the unlikely event of his being late. The road was clear back and front as we slowed up, and I slipped out of the van and skipped over the tailboard of his fifteen-hundredweight. He started with a jerk and we sped ahead of the Morris which turned off down the side road to Ismalia.

The inner compound was, as usual, deserted when we arrived. I walked into my small, hot, mud hut. My clothes were already laid out on the bed. Finnessy jerked his head towards them.

"Get into 'em right away, Pete," he said. "The pilot and the navigator are coming along shortly to go over the maps with you."

"Have I got to receive them in fancy dress?"

"'Fraid so. You also talk to them in pidgin English."

"What the hell for?"

"There's always a chance of them being shot down or having to force-land somewhere. If they believe you're a bohunk there's no chance of them saying anything else if they get the screws put on 'em. That way, the Krauts don't know there's an Englishman on the loose." There was sense in that. Things were beginning to follow some sort of logical pattern now that I was getting over my nervous irritation.

"You've got to hear me say my piece, I understand," I told him.

"Not until just before you get on the plane. Haven't got it myself yet." He rose and went over to the door as the sound of an approaching truck came to us, and peered into the gathering gloom. "O.K.—here's the R.A.F. boys at the barrier. Come over to the map room when you're through."

I finished changing, and then walked across to the central hut. Two pilot-officers bent over a one-inch map. They looked up as I entered. "Does he speak English?" asked one of them.

"A bit," Finnessy answered. "Take it slowly."

"You show spot?" the pilot asked in the universal way of our race when dealing with the benighted native—three tones higher than normal, in broken English. I looked at the map for a moment or so and then put my finger in the centre of our last DZ.

"Gen type," grunted the navigator. "Just where Charles showed us. Right, Giles, let's work out the flight-plan." They transposed the spot to their own large-scale chart and got busy with dividers and computers.

"You make jump before?" asked the pilot, going through the motions of a confused seagull coming in to land in a high wind.

I nodded. "One two, plenty," I told him.

The pilot shrugged, "Sooner you than me, cocky."

This was the worst yet. - Four thousand feet. No moon. No

drop in speed. No chattering, friendly rabble below. No signals—and above all, no Andreas.

In the age-long second that I floated motionless like Mohammed's coffin between heaven and earth, and watched the flat underbelly and spitting exhausts pass over me, I felt more lonely than I had ever been in my life. Then the static-line took up, and I whirled and twisted and spun like a leaf in an October gale.

This was my first jump at speed. I didn't like it. I didn't like the black canopy that floated above me like the devil's wing. I liked the spine-jarring thump and the ensuing drag over the loose scree and through scrub-thorn even less. But I was down. I was on my own. This was it.

I had taken a hell of a time to get down. The sound of the plane was dying on the soughing wind as I pulled in on the rigging lines and gathered the chute up into a loose bundle. I scrabbled round in the darkness until I found a bush growing out from a large, round boulder, and under it I stuffed the billowing silk, covering it finally with chunks of rock.

A thin, cold mist was rising to meet the layer of nimbus cloud through which I had come down. Blind navigation is a chancy business at the best of times, and I might have been anywhere within ten square miles of the map-spot at which we had aimed. It was no good trying to orientate myself until I could see something, so I climbed the slope to the plateau at the top and then curled up in the lee of a boulder until dawn.

I must have fallen into an uneasy sleep because the sun was just appearing over the jagged peaks to the east when I woke, stiff and chilled in the morning cool that would all too soon turn to parching, merciless heat. The mist swirled in the valley below.

To the north, Mount Simnos with its characteristic lion's head rose to its majestic seven thousand feet, while the maned neck, sloping back, and finally the tail, swept in serpentine length round the twenty-mile valley that ended in the plateau on which I stood.

I couldn't believe it at first—not even after I had checked and rechecked it by map and compass. They had dropped me a good fifteen miles nearer to Achilles' hideout than we had asked them to. At least, that's what it appeared from my calculations. If I was right, and nobody had spotted it in the meantime, in that clump of she-oak just across the valley below the faintly-defined goat-path, should be the wireless set I had dumped on the last trip, when the German patrol caught us.

I clambered down into the valley, waded through the stream at the bottom, and then climbed to the clump. The set was there.

The gnarled branches and thick foliage had cushioned the fall and, in any case, those sets were built to take some bumps. As far as I could see it was still workable and, when I had connected up the leads, the valves gave a strong, reassuring hum.

I listened for a while on each of our three fixed frequencies, but there was no traffic at that hour. I wondered whether I might

risk a short transmission in code—just to tell them at the other end that I had landed—and then with a wry grin I realised that since the aircrew would have reported by this time that I had jumped, that would be a reasonable assumption anyway.

The thing was, of course, that I was desperately lonely and just wanted to talk to somebody. I put the idea aside firmly—but the very presence of the set was comforting, not to mention the fact that I had less far to walk than I had anticipated. I carefully repacked the set in its carrying straps and hid it under a shelving rock, then I sat back in the lee of the clump, munched some of my compressed rations, and reconsidered my next move.

If I moved off now I would arrive in Achilles' valley long before sunset—the last thing I wanted. At the same time, I did not want to waste this bonus. Having had one disastrous experience on the path above me, I didn't fancy using it again in broad daylight either. Arguments for and against moving off seemed to cancel out. British compromise seemed to be the answer. I decided to cross the path and climb the slope the other side, up a dry water-course that cut its sheer face. Above the false crest that my map showed some two hundred feet higher up, I would be able to move along parallel to the path but, with care, shielded from the view of anybody moving up or down it.

I stowed map, compass, and rations away in my shepherd's bag and settled my .45 more comfortably in the shoulder holster under my jacket. These things were necessary, although if I were caught before I had a chance to jettison them they were, in themselves, my death warrant.

After one false start, when a herd of wild goats jumping the narrow cleft at the top of the watercourse sent a shower of small stones down on me and nearly caused my heart to stop, I got to the shoulder of the crest.

The sun was well up by now and all signs of morning mist had cleared. The goats that had so scared me had gained an even higher crest and they looked down on me like a group of sardonic grandfathers. On motionless wings, two hundred feet below me, a golden eagle breasted the up-current from the valley.

I checked my position by the black mane of Simnos and moved off along the crest. Away from the path I felt safer, and the ease with which I had been able to orientate myself, the fact that I was closer to Achilles' valley than I had dared hope and, illogically enough, the finding of the wireless set just where I had thrown it, all gave me an upsurge of confidence.

I was doing all right. The breaks were coming—let's ride them.

I strode out jauntily—until I rounded the first bend in the crest, and the man rose from behind a boulder. © Berkely Mather 1959

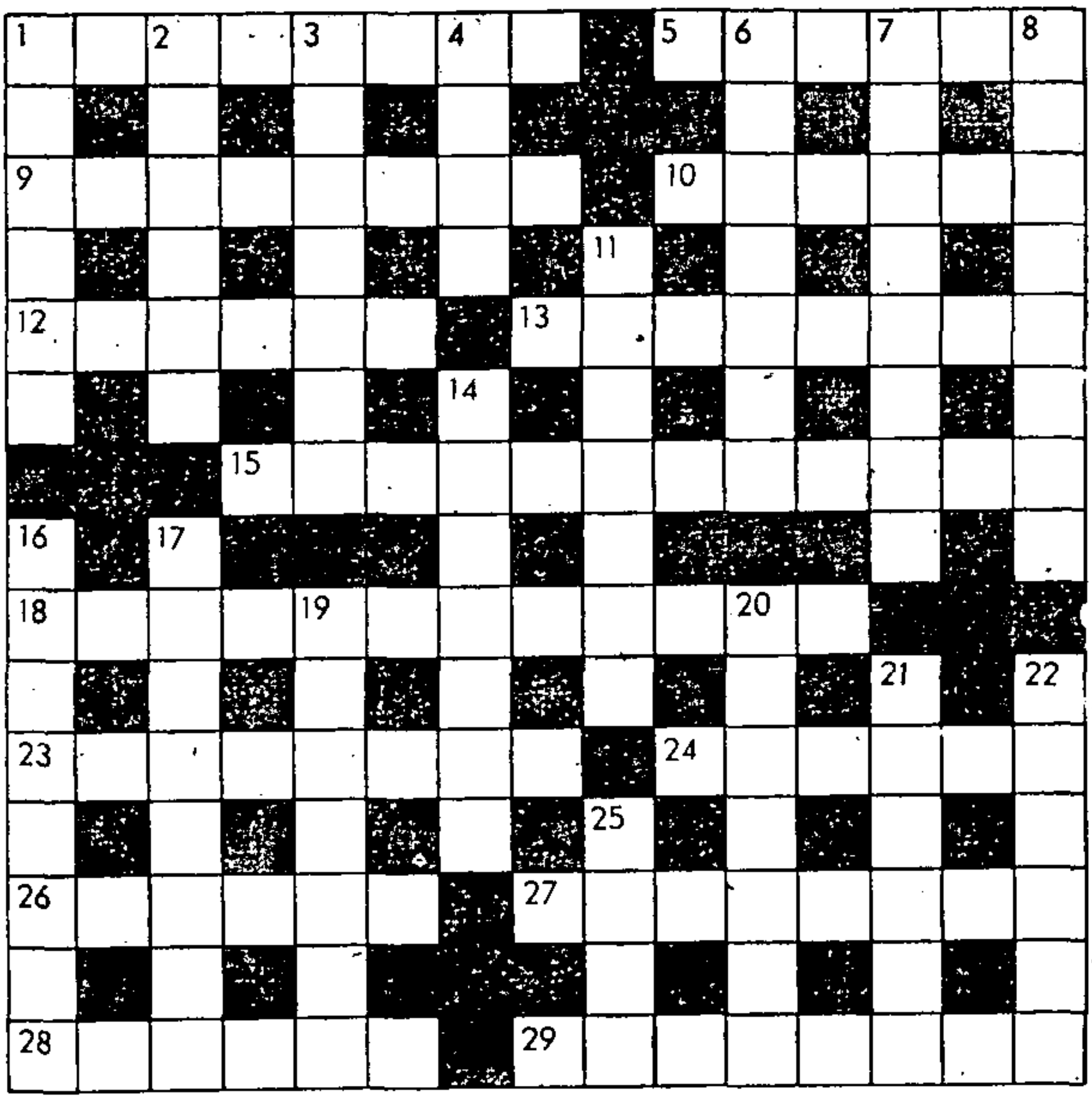
★ ***The second part of The Achilles Affair, by Berkely Mather, appears in next month's Argosy on sale February 10***

# ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 98

★



## CLUES

### Across

1 Motor going fast—that's shell ! (8).

5 Swallow's most of the cocktail (6).

9 Am tall in Spanish veil (8).

10 To wit, a bedouin beetle (6).

12 States how we stand (6).

13 Song sounds like soft drink (8).

15 Showy outsize tent leads to IOUs (12).

18 Rustic measure (7-5).

23 Time on one's hands ? No, on the brain (8).

24 Dryden's heroine's a vile R.A. (6).

26 Venetian Red ? (6).

27 Rough passage on tough vessel (8).

28 Fresh visitor, or fishy ? (6).

29 Tool to cobble with? (5-3).

### Down

1 We're in the quad under canvas (6).

2 Gone off—quick, to Scotland Yard (6).

3 Somewhat stiff manuals (7).

4 Yearling gun? (4).

6, 21 Old legal luminaries (7, 6).

7 To read or the bull's opponent (8).

8 Peers south-east to oblige (8).

11 May win, but not the bride (4, 3).

14 Year in, year out ! (3, 4).

16 Blissful standing east central (8).

17 Grey-blue 4 met little Albert (3-5).

19 Saddest words (3, 4).

20 Where Atalanta met deranged clay don (7).

21 See 6 down.

22 Exotic fruit two feet across (6).

25 Crystalline found in cellars (4).

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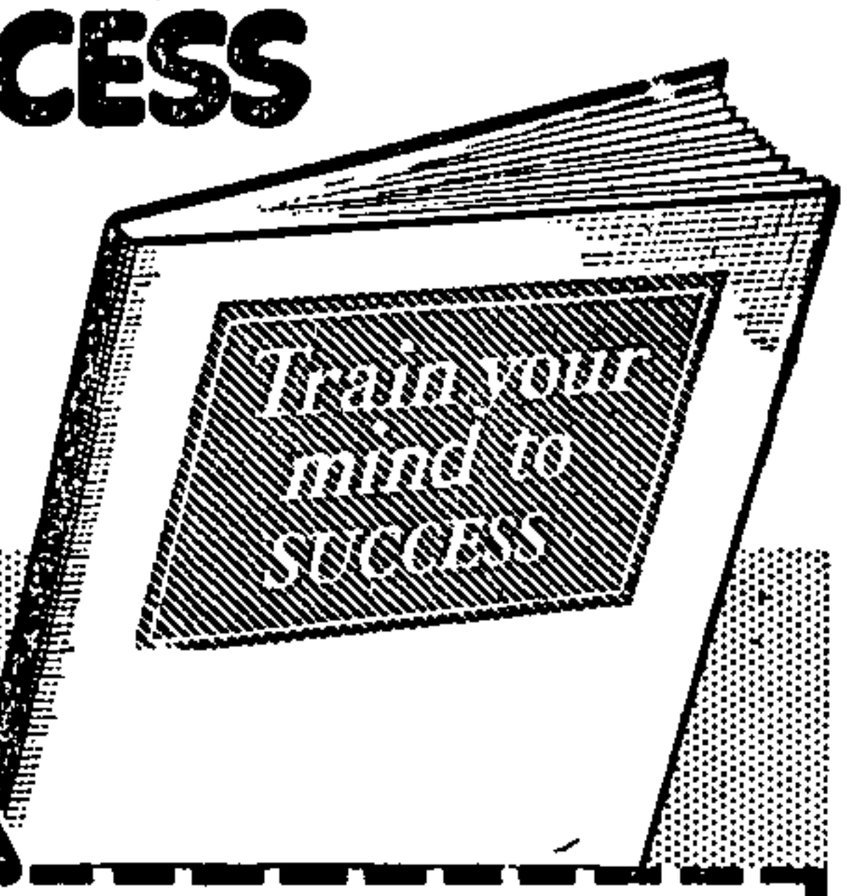


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*(A stamp for reply is appreciated but not essential)*

## PRACTICAL RESULTS

*Student* 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . *Student* 778/2119. I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July, I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . , *Student* 182: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it. . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . .*Student* 1954/15, I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another. I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 3 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.